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**MOBILISING WOMEN: SOCIAL CHANGE AND POLITICAL
ORGANISATION IN THE WEST BANK AND GAZA STRIP, 1967-1990.**

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1994



20 JUN 1995

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Mobilising Women: Social Change and Political
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Abstract

This thesis examines the mobilisation of women in the Palestinian national movement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The introduction seeks to place the issues raised in the body of the thesis within the general context of the experience of women in Africa and Asia.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the nature of Israeli occupation, and the development of Palestinian responses to it. The thesis then offers a historical account of the growth of Palestinian women's organisations in the context of anti-colonial, and nationalist, politics.

Subsequent chapters consider the impact of social issues on the role of women within Palestinian society, and the relationship of women's organisations to the national movement. Within this context, the underlying theme of the thesis is the nature of the relationship between the politics of nation, class and gender under military occupation.



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List of Abbreviations

DFLP Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

GUPW General Union of Palestinian Women.

NGC National Guidance Committee.

PNF Palestine National Front.

PNC Palestine National Council.

PFWAC Palestinian Federation of Women's Action
Committees.

PFLP Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

UNLU United National Leadership of the Uprising.

UNRWA United Nations Relief and Works Agency.

UPWC Union of Palestinian Women's Committees.

UPWWC Union of Palestinian Working Women's
Committees.

WCSW Women's Committees for Social Work.

WHC Women's High Council.

Introduction

In the past twenty years there has been a growing interest in questions concerning the relationship between gender and nationalism in Asia and Africa. Various aspects of this relationship have been examined at some length.

Initially the promotion of women's social and civil rights was located within the context of greater contact with the West. Emphasis was placed upon the importance of factors such as the development of an indigenous bourgeoisie, the advent of female education and the opening up of the professions to women.

Increasingly, greater importance was placed upon the relationship between anti-colonial national movements and the emergence of women's movements. In this respect Jayawardena's 1988 study of nationalist movements in 'the third world' was significant because of its scope, and because it suggested links between the emergence of women's militancy in the context of nationalist movements, and the socio-economic impact of Western

encroachment. These themes have been explored further in a number of case studies looking at the involvement of women in national liberation movements - for example in Nicaragua, Eritrea, and South Africa.

In the 1970s the leftist view of the relationship between national and women's liberation in the context of anti-colonial movements found its apotheosis in statements like that of the President of Mozambique, the late Samora Machel

Women's liberation is to be achieved by the abolition of private property and women's entry into social production, both of which are inseparable from socialist strategy itself and therefore requiring no separate struggle (Jacobs and Howard, 1987:29).

The experience of women such as those in Algeria has done much to temper the more simplistic formulations of the relationship between national and gender liberation. However, the idea of there being, in some sense, a linear progression from national to social liberation (of which gender liberation forms one part) remains.

An extension of this leftist-nationalist approach to gender issues is the suggestion that the position of women in post-colonial Africa and Asia is essentially

determined by the economics of international capitalism (Abdel Kader, 1987:148-9). In this context women are viewed as a reserve pool of labour, which in times of economic growth is mobilised and thus able to attain economic, social and civil advantages. At times of economic slow-down women are pushed back into the domestic environment and suffer from state-led attacks upon their social and civil rights.

Dominelli's 1986 case study of Algerian women in the process of autogestion comes within this general theoretical framework. In this sense, in the post-colonial state, the primary determining factor for women's emancipation is economic. This approach would tend to place politics and state policy as secondary factors, arising out of economic conditions.

Some recent studies have examined the significance of gender in nation formation - at the cultural level in terms of symbol and image, and at the socio-economic level in terms of state policy and planning (Afshar, 1987; Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1989; Kandiyoti, 1991). In these studies the impact of the state, and of state-sponsored ideology upon women, is examined in a range of case studies. The significance of gendered constructs of

the nation and the state, and the role of ideology in promoting these, is often seen as being in conflict with the economic policies of the state, illustrating the operation of contradictory elements within the state apparatus.

Within these discussions the dichotomy between concepts of 'tradition' and 'modernity' and their impact upon women is emphasized:

In a society where change is viewed as an external attack and where tradition occupies a pre-eminent place in the so-called strategies for 'the future' and for 'development policies' (as is the case in the Muslim countries), ideology and perception have an over-determining influence (Mernissi, 1988:3).

In the convergence of tradition and development, women assume a key role as the repositories of national identity, and of the 'authentic'. Consequently, they often bear the brunt of these contradictions in terms of state ideology, law and policy.

These contradictions in the fields of education, health, population control, familial relations, and employment have been examined in a number of case studies (Beck and Keddie, 1978; Fernea, 1985; Afshar, 1987).

When 'traditional' practices are reinterpreted as being 'authentic' representations of national culture, and thus as holding a key to an essentially legitimate, indigenous form of modernisation, particular questions could arise - such as the issue of veiling. Minces argued that the veil grew in significance as increasing numbers of rural poor migrated to towns, and laid greater emphasis on the importance of veiling because of their changed circumstances. At the same time, the indigenous bourgeoisie began to question aspects of tradition in the light of Western influences. This combination of factors meant that:

the veil gained additional importance as a means for many poor families to defend the traditional Islamic values against Western incursions, cultural depersonalization and the supposed or real moral laxity of Westernized women (1982:50).

The veil could become a symbol of resistance to the outside world (defined in terms of both the personal and the international), and of a distinct Muslim identity for women which provided an alternative view of emancipation and its meaning:

This retreat into puritanical Islam was not seen simply as a holding onto the past, but also as a positive road for the future (Tabari, 1982:13).

It was this complex mix of 'tradition' and 'modernity', particularly within the context of an Islamic culture, that Ahmed saw as antithetical to the emergence of a sustained feminist movement in the Middle East.

She argued that there was nothing surprising in the suggestion that feminism and Islam were incompatible, as feminism should be viewed as out of step with all dominant, patriarchal ideologies, whatever their origin. Rather she referred to the sense of 'cultural betrayal' which is visited upon any challenger of Arab-Islamic cultural orthodoxy as placing Arab feminists in a particularly difficult situation (1982:161-2).

She expanded upon this view in a subsequent article, suggesting that the conflict between cultural and gender identities placed Middle Eastern feminists in an 'excruciating' dilemma:

caught between these two opposing loyalties, forced almost to choose between betrayal and betrayal (1984:122).

Thus, questions of identity are central to much of the discourse on gender and feminism in the Middle East because of the region's particular historic, cultural and religious legacy.

The desire to come to terms with such contradictions has resulted in an attempt by some Middle Eastern feminists to undertake a partial revaluation of the relationship between women's status and Islam. The work of social anthropologists like Tillion (1983) did much to illustrate the diversity of Islamic practise, and thus to begin to deconstruct the orientalist vision of a monolithic 'Islamic' attitude towards women.

Tillion suggested that Islamic practice varied from region to region according to the strength of pre-Islamic customs in a particular area, so that aspects of women's subordination in the Middle East which are often regarded as Islamic, should instead be viewed as primarily aspects of patriarchal domination which have adopted and adapted aspects of Islamic belief for their own preservation.

Al-Hibri (1982) suggested that it could be argued that patriarchy coopted (and by implication, subverted) Islam, which in its pristine state was essentially an egalitarian religion. The difficulties of proffering such arguments are acknowledged in her conclusion:

It would have been easier to dismiss the whole question on the basis that religion is a patriarchal tool. However, this is (a) giving too much to Patriarchy, (b) ignoring the sentiments of feminist Muslim women who find the problems...very real, and (c) ignoring the task of a woman to correctly understand her own herstory after it has been presented to her from the perspective of the western colonizer (1982:219).

By contrast, Sabbah suggests that there is a clearly delineated hierarchical structure which is central to 'the sacred discourse' - God, male, female, children - and which is a:

central device for the application of sacred power. It is the mirror, the echo, and the logical extension of the universe as fashioned by the divine will (1984:74).

The debate over identity, ideology and women's status in the Middle East has continued alongside a number of other strands of enquiry concerning the assertion of social, economic and political rights. As Mernissi states:

It is in access to public space, employment, and education that women's lives have undergone the most fundamental changes. Space, employment, and education seem to be the areas where the struggles which agitate society (especially the class struggle) show up in the life of women with the greatest clarity (1988:3).

There have been a number of studies on women and employment. Youssef's 1974 work offered a comparative study of the Middle East and Latin America, while Hijab (1988) provided a regional overview of the impact of women's entry into the labour market in the Arab states.

There have also been a number of country specific investigations into female employment patterns. These tend to emphasize the impact of the growth of women's waged labour in relation to her reproductive role. The contradiction between women's productive and reproductive roles was illustrated by Afshar with the suggestion that

in the case of working class women in Iran 'access to paid work became more of a loss than a gain' (1987: 229). She recounts that women worked extremely long hours for very poor wages - which were often paid not to her but to a male relative. In addition, the full burden of domestic work remained with them, despite the fact that they might often be the only wage earner in the family:

As a result the advocates of domesticity for women found a large support base among the poor and working classes, both male and female (1987:229).

Dominelli reaches similar conclusions in her study of women workers in Algeria. Having illustrated the plight of women caught in the trap of having to do two jobs, she concludes by saying that women are not:

liberated in their role as waged workers for they are predominantly located in the lower echelons of the labour hierarchy (1986:37).

Thus, in the context of the Middle East, at least, the Marxist argument that women's emancipation comes through entry into the waged labour market is not necessarily supported. As Dominelli suggested,

Workers control needs to resolve the problem of patriarchy as well as the relationship between capital and labour (1986:172).

The conflict between women's productive and reproductive roles is also reflected in discussions over family planning. This remains a sensitive subject as it seems to

epitomise the unresolved conflicts of cultural, national and personal identity with which women have to contend.

The literature concerning Palestinian women has embraced many of these discussions and debates. The mid-1980s saw a growing interest in the position of Palestinian women - both within their society and within the national movement. The Intifada, which began in December 1987, stimulated interest further, and as a result there has been a rash of recent publications concerning Palestinian women. This was largely the result of the prominent public role that women played in the initial stages of the Intifada - in street demonstrations, protests and pickets, in committees, and as spokespersons for the national movement.

Most of the writing on Palestinian women has been concerned to place women within the context of the national struggle and to highlight their contribution to the national movement. The issues under discussion have not changed substantially since Mogannam's 1937 work, **The Arab Woman and the Palestine Problem.**

Mogannam provided a critique of women's status in Palestinian society, advocating radical improvements in

women's education, health and employment status, as well as the desirability of changes to her legal status, etc. However, women's emancipation was seen as secondary to the national question. In essence this view remained virtually unchanged for the next fifty years.

Writing on Palestinian women has been dominated by the context of the national struggle. Much of it contains interesting social perspectives on the lives of Palestinian women, and on the changes which have overtaken them in the last half century. This is perhaps particularly true of those studies that have relied heavily upon interviews with Palestinian women - whether in exile, or under occupation (e.g. Antonius, 1980; Sayigh, 1981; Bendt and Downing, 1982). However, the major aim of such writings has been to contribute to a particular Palestinian national image in a situation where the themes of identity, nation, and gender had become inextricably intertwined.

Sayigh (1985) and Peteet (1986) did attempt to provide a critique of the position of women in the national movement. Sayigh's article was concerned with the national struggle as it unfolded in exile in Lebanon, and looked at the impact of national crises on the organisation of women. She also briefly aired an internal

critique of the functioning of the General Union of Palestinian Women. Peteet's 1986 article presented a discussion of the relationship between domesticity and the national struggle within the context of exiled Palestinians in Lebanon.

Palestinian women played a central role in the preservation of national political culture - whether living in exile or under military occupation. In effect this resulted in the politicisation of the domestic sphere. However, the nature of women's domestic role has not been the subject of open debate and discussion - a fact which seriously inhibited a radical critique of patriarchal society within the women's movement during the 1980s.

Abdo (1991) differentiated between the nationalism of the state and that of the national liberation movement. Although national liberation movements could create a space for women's increased participation in society:

The real problem lies in the fact that national liberations, by definition, are not about gender or class emancipation. And yet, during the process of liberation, the dynamics of the movement is bound to unveil and challenge the basis of the nation's imagined harmony, particularly around the issue of gender relations (1991:26).

In effect, Abdo begins to deconstruct the concept of national liberation and examine the nature of gender images used to promote the idea of Palestine.

Aspects of Palestinian women's lives, apart from the national struggle, have not received much attention. Haddad (1980) provided a general overview of women in Palestinian society. She looked at the traditional family structure, aspects of the honour code, the expansion of female education and employment, and the role of women since 1948. She concluded by saying:

In internalising and appropriating 'honour' restrictions, the modern Palestinian woman is rejecting the early champions of female liberty, i.e. the Western colonisers and the missionaries who advocated Western customs and ideals as normative...To appropriate Western norms as the elite did at the turn of the century is to abdicate responsibility and the freedom to be Palestinian and to decide and fashion Palestinian priorities and destiny (Haddad, 1980:167).

This provides a further illustration of the overwhelming dominance of the issues of identity, tradition, and authenticity within the context of national movement, that have monopolised much of the literature on Palestinian women.

The number of social surveys specifically concerned with the position of Palestinian women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are relatively few. Rockwell (1985) looked at the conditions of women workers in the Gaza Strip, and provided valuable documentation of the changing working

patterns affecting women, and their impact upon family and social structures. Pesa (1985) produced a short but informative insight into the conditions of women workers in the textile industry. Taking the village of al-Balaad as her case study, Moors (1990) offered a number of interesting insights into changes in gender hierarchy within the domestic economy.

Changes affecting the Palestinian family in the West Bank and Gaza Strip were the subject of a study by Ata (1986). His material was gathered from a limited sample survey and covered a wide range of social indicators, tabulating them with regard to age, gender and class.

Recently there have been a spate of books concerning Palestinian women - their role in the national movement, their changing social status, and their experiences of exile, war and occupation (e.g. Warnock, 1990; Peteet, 1991; Hiltermann, 1991; Strum, 1992).

Peteet developed the themes already outlined in her earlier articles (see above), and suggested that among women active in the Palestinian national movement in Lebanon:

Domesticity remained paramount; few rejected its primacy...political activism was being grafted onto domesticity, politicizing and mobilizing the domestic sector (1991:99).

Although her work is concerned with Palestinian women in Lebanon, it has much to say about the general nature of women's mobilisation in the national movement. Hiltermann, on the other hand, is concerned more with the politics of women's participation in the national movement in the West Bank. He compares the role of women's organisations with the trade unions, and offers a critique of mass mobilisation under occupation, again emphasising the subordination of the social to the national issue.

This thesis seeks to examine the mobilisation of women in the Palestinian national movement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. It is concerned with the process of mobilisation. How have women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip been drawn into the national movement? What have been the primary causes of growth in women's activism? Has the nature of that activism changed substantially over the years?

It is possible to discern a number of strands in the process of women's mobilisation. In general terms they can be loosely grouped as processes of social change, and of political organisation.

Israeli occupation is clearly the dominant experience within which political activity in the West Bank and Gaza Strip takes place. At the same time there are other significant factors which have affected women's mobilisation. The expansion of women's education; improvements in health care; changing perceptions of the

family and of women's social status; the growth of women's employment; and the impact of migrant labour on the position of women in the domestic economy, are all important influences. However, the impact of these changes varies according to class, social background, and location.

At the level of political organisation there have been a number of significant developments over the last 25 years. The growth of the national movement and the emergence of the PLO as the dominant force in Palestinian national politics has provided the framework within which the Palestinian women's organisations have situated themselves. This has been a determining factor in both their activities and their agendas. It has also had a direct impact upon their mobilising and organisational potential.

The nationalist orientation of the women's organisations has been a key factor in the apparent continuity which informs much of their activity - whether in terms of their leadership, activities or aims. On the other hand, clear signs of divergence - of change - are illustrated by the broadening scope of women's activism.

Chapter 1 provides an historical overview of the Israeli occupation and Palestinian responses to it, while Chapter 2 focuses upon the development of women's organisations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Elements of social change, and their impact upon women's mobilisation are

examined in chapters 3 and 4 which consider issues of education, employment, health, dress and culture. Finally, Chapter 5 looks at the nature of women's involvement in the Intifada.

In highlighting the interaction of national, class and gender politics in the development of Palestinian women's organisations, this thesis seeks to examine the nature of women's mobilisation in the national movement not, primarily, in terms of their position within various national organisations, but in relation to the background experience which led to their mobilisation. What was the impact of changes in education, employment, healthcare and family status upon the mobilisation of women in the national movement, and what affect did these factors have on the type of national work they prioritised?

The 1980s - and particularly the period of the Intifada - provides an opportunity to examine the relationship of the women's organisations to the national movement. It also raises questions about the nature of their ambiguous attitudes towards social issues, and the development of an agenda for change.

CHAPTER 1

Occupation and Resistance in the West Bank and Gaza Strip 1967-87.

If occupation breeds resistance, then the nature of any particular occupation must have an important impact on the type of resistance it produces. In order to understand why Palestinian resistance to Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip took the form it did, and why this eventually resulted in the Intifada¹, it is necessary to look briefly at some salient aspects of the Israeli occupation and their impact upon Palestinian society in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

This is not to dismiss the importance of other primary influences upon the internal resistance movement as it developed in the 1970s and 1980s: the nature of the diaspora experience of a large proportion of the Palestinian population; the establishment of the PLO, its relations with the Arab world and the strategy and tactics it employed in the liberation struggle.

This chapter will begin by briefly outlining the situation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip before 1967 and the essential economic and political features of the occupation. It will then look at the development of the Palestinian response to occupation.

West Bank and Gaza, 1948-67.

Before the Israeli occupation of the West Bank the area was still predominantly rural in character. In 1961 nearly 40 per cent of the total labour force was employed

in agriculture (Kahan quoted in Samara, 1988:93). More than 50 per cent of these were self-employed and a further 15 per cent worked for a family member. Approximately 30 per cent were wage labourers (Hilal quoted in Graham-Brown, 1984:183) - a sizeable proportion of whom were refugees who had been farmers but had lost their land in 1948.

The size of the plots being worked was small: in 1965 84.2 per cent of landholdings were under 50 *dunams*² (and nearly 50 per cent were less than ten *dunams*). This represented a considerable increase in land fragmentation as the comparable figure for 1953 was 63.5 per cent. This was largely the result of population growth and the inheritance system, which allowed all male offspring to inherit property, combined with a lack of alternative employment opportunities.

The predominance of agriculture in the West Bank economy during Jordanian rule is seen in the fact that, despite the area's small size, it produced half of Jordan's agricultural exports, and the majority of its fruit, vegetables and olives. The other main sources of income were tourism and remittances from abroad.

Under Jordanian rule, the large landowning families of the West Bank were encouraged to expand agricultural production. As an incentive, in 1951, the Jordanian government introduced tax exemption on income derived from agricultural land (Smith, 1984:91).

Farming, even on unirrigated land became a lucrative business for those with land and the capital to bring it into cultivation (Smith, 1984:92).

At the same time, the refugee population provided a ready pool of cheap agricultural labour. Most of those who found employment did so on medium or large landholdings - that is farms of more than 200 *dunams*. In 1953 they accounted for about 5 per cent of total landholdings in the West Bank.

Large estates existed in the Jerusalem, Hebron and Nablus districts before 1948, and during the 1950s, land in the Jordan Valley was bought up and developed. It was the large landowning families like the Barghoutis, Jaiyussis, Abdul Hadis, Tuqans, Jarrars and Nimrs who were best placed to take advantage of the new situation. As trade patterns shifted away from the Mediterranean and Red Sea to East Jordan and the Levant and Arabia, their links with the merchant families of East Jordan was an additional factor in their favour (Smith, 1984:94).

In order to ensure their control of the market, these families used their links with the administration in Amman to limit access to the market by other producers - whether exporters to Jordan, or small domestic producers. That they could ensure a high price for their own produce while closing the market to small producers meant that the latter were obliged to sell to the dominant producers (who also marketed the goods) at a relatively low price. This process was enhanced by the establishment, in 1950, of a government inspectorate to regulate agricultural exports. This had the effect of making it very difficult for small producers to engage in trade independently of the government administration. Furthermore,

The fact that the post of Minister of Agriculture was reserved for those large landowners and members of the *sharifian* families like the Nashashibis, Jaiyussis and Tuqans who supported Jordanian rule in

the West Bank made it even more difficult for the small landholders to be heard in Amman (Smith, 1984:96).

Thus, the aftermath of 1948 was marked, on the one hand, by increasing fragmentation of landholdings and the emergence of a sizeable class of landless agricultural wage labourers. On the other hand, there was a considerable growth in the income of the large landowning families who were able to exploit the increased demand for agricultural production caused by the loss of so much agricultural land to Israel, and the enormous increase in population.

For the 1948 refugees who found themselves in the West Bank (estimated by the United Nations to total 280,000 (McDowall, 1987:10) the period to 1967 brought little in terms of economic or political relief. The original tented encampments were replaced by one or two-roomed houses as the refugee camps took on an air of permanence, but there was little long-term economic or social planning to deal with some of the problems resulting from such an enormous upheaval of population. Indeed the terms of UNRWA's mandate worked against the emergence of any such strategy, and neither the Jordanian or Egyptian governments could afford to grasp the political nettle implicit in developing such policies - even if the necessary resources had been available.

In Gaza the refugee problem was even worse - 190,000 refugees vastly outnumbered the indigenous population of 80,000 (McDowall, 1987:10). The immense social dislocation which accompanied the influx of so many refugees, the loss of Gaza's hinterland and its effective collapse as a major port, combined to produce a sense of social and

economic devastation. The importance of citrus farming and fishing, along with some handicraft production, remained, but the major role of UNRWA - not just as the provider of essential services to the refugee population, but as the source of a substantial proportion of Gaza's GDP - highlighted the economic destitution of Gaza and its essential non-viability as an autonomous economic unit (Mandell,1985:8).

There was little industry in Gaza - what existed was based round the citrus crop and consisted of fruit packing and bottling. The other main source of employment was servicing the Egyptian army. In 1960 approximately 60 per cent of the workforce was employed in the service and construction sectors, while a third was engaged in agriculture (Roy,1987). However, a large proportion of the population, and notably the refugee population, were unemployed - and remained so until the 1970s (Graham-Brown, 1979:19).

In conclusion, the period of Jordanian rule saw the agricultural sector of the West Bank economy develop in both size and scope - production increased and new areas of land (notably in the Jordan valley) were brought into cultivation. However, for small producers working on family plots the ability to benefit from the increased demand for agricultural production was limited by the marketing monopoly enjoyed by the large landowning families. These families provided the political support base for the Jordanian administration in the West Bank.

Alongside the prosperity of this sector, there were the problems created by land pressure, unemployment and underemployment in the rest of the economy. Small

producers were finding that profits were limited in the marketing of their agricultural surplus, while the mass of rural refugees created by the creation of the state of Israel remained largely unemployed. The economy of the West Bank (and the situation was even worse in Gaza) was unable to absorb such a large influx of refugees. The rural sector already hid considerable underemployment and the industrial sector was negligible.

Thus, when Israel invaded the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967 the economy was already weak, and the impact of the oil boom and the consequent influx of Gulf money had not yet occurred.

The Economic Impact of the Israeli Occupation.

The Israeli occupation brought major economic changes to the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In general structural terms the economies of the two areas, cut off from their main markets - Jordan and Egypt (and, by extension, the wider Arab world) - quickly found themselves subordinated to the needs of the Israeli economy. This new relationship had two particularly striking aspects: the provision of a cheap pool of labour for the Israeli economy, and the emergence of the Occupied Territories as the second largest market (after the United States) for Israeli exports². When Israel invaded the West Bank and Gaza Strip there was already a high level of unemployment among the refugee population (particularly in Gaza) and an apparently high level of underemployment in the rural sector (Graham-Brown, 1979:11)).

The immediate effect of the occupation was a sizable exodus of Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The total number of refugees in the 18 months between June 1967 and December 1968 was estimated at 325,000 (250,000 from the West Bank and 75,000 from Gaza) (Abu-Lughod, 1983:14).

The Israeli-conducted census of September 1967 registered a 25 per cent drop in population. The total population of the Occupied Territories was put at 1,022,000 - which meant that 325,000 people were not registered (Whittome, 1990:3). Those Palestinians who were not present in the Occupied Territories during the census lost their right of residence ⁴.

Outmigration from the Occupied Territories (particularly the West Bank) did not cease at the end of 1968 - although the rate did slow down. As Abu-Lughod explained, the rate of migration was close to the rate of natural growth so that the total Palestinian population of the West Bank and Gaza Strip remained relatively static until recently.

The Israeli occupation and the growth of opportunities in the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia meant that for many Palestinians employment in the Gulf became an increasingly attractive option. This was particularly so for the urban educated and skilled workers who had few opportunities in the West Bank and none in Israel. In the late 1980s it was estimated that remittances of West Bank workers in the Gulf States stood at \$350 million per year (Samara, 1988:165 n.16). The growth in the GNP of the Occupied Territories in the 1970s was largely a product of this migration and the increased remittances that resulted from it (Graham-Brown, 1979:11):

Remittances, public and private, made up one-third of the GDP of the Gaza (sic) and just under one-quarter of GDP in the West Bank in 1980 (Graham-Brown, 1984c:200).

Samara suggests that in the period 1968 to 1982 between 165-170,000 Palestinians emigrated from the West Bank for employment purposes. He notes that this figure exceeds the total West Bank workforce, including those working in the area itself and in Israel, as well as the unemployed (Samara, 1988:105).

Apart from migration, employment in Israel became an increasingly widespread phenomenon as the occupation continued. In 1984 only 46 per cent of the total West Bank workforce was employed within the domestic economy - the rest working either in Israel or abroad, (Samara, 1988:107).

The importance of employment in Israel was established during the early years of the occupation. The percentage of West Bank workers employed in Israel increased from 24.8 in 1970 to 50.5 in 1973 (these figures would include workers who were not registered with the Israeli labour office and who did not appear in official statistics) (Hilal, 1974:11). However, for particularly vulnerable economic groups these figures were likely to be substantially higher. For example, one survey of West Bank refugee camp residents suggested that up to 75 per cent of the male workforce was employed in Israel (Ata, 1986:41). In 1984 it was estimated that about 50,000 West Bankers were employed in Israel. Nearly half of that number worked in the construction industry. It was further estimated that West Bankers alone constituted 33 per cent of the labour force in the Israeli construction industry, 25 per cent in agriculture, 3 per cent in

industry and 1 per cent in the public services (Samara,1988:108).

In the Gaza Strip in 1960 the employment level stood at 56,000 whereas the number of unemployed was 88,750 (Roy,1987). In the immediate aftermath of the 1967 war unemployment rose by another 20,000 (Roy,1987) as jobs in the large service sector were lost. Between 1970 and 1985 the number of Gazans officially employed in Israel grew from 5,900 to 41,700 - or from 10 per cent to 45 per cent of the total Gaza workforce (Roy,1987).

Additional incentives for Palestinians to seek employment in Israel were found in the economic decline of the Occupied Territories and the soaring inflation of the mid-1970s which led to price parity with Israel and signalled the rapid economic integration of the two areas. At the outbreak of the Intifada there were approximately 110,000 Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip working in Israel. The vast majority of them worked in low paid unskilled jobs in construction, services and agriculture. The average pay for a Palestinian worker was 50 per cent that of an Israeli. The working day was long - sometimes 10-12 hours and travel to and from work meant that there was little time left for anything else (it is illegal for a Palestinian worker to remain overnight in Israel without a special permit) (McDowall,1987:22).

The high level of employment in the Israeli economy had a major impact on the economy of the Occupied Territories. On one level, combined with the remittances from migrant workers abroad, it contributed to increased purchasing power within the economy. This was mainly reflected in

the growth in demand for consumer durables (mostly of Israeli origin), and by a boom in house construction. At the structural level, in the West Bank there was a major shift in the pattern of employment away from the agricultural sector towards waged labour in Israel. Between 1968 and 1980 the percentage of the labour force employed in agriculture fell from 45 to 26 per cent (Graham-Brown, 1983:6).

This was not the only sector which witnessed a declining - or a static - level of employment. In the period 1970-86 there were only 16,000 new jobs created in the West Bank economy, while in Gaza the number of locally employed actually fell by more than 2,000 over the same period. By contrast, more than 95,000 Palestinians found work in Israel (Saleh, 1990:46).

The decline in employment opportunities in the West Bank and Gaza is reflected in the diminishing value of the productive sectors of the economy to the GNP - between 1970-73 and 1984-86 the contribution of agriculture fell from 34 to 23 percent, and that of industry never reached more than eight percent (Saleh, 1990:47).

With this decline in the productive sectors of the economy there was a change in the make-up of the locally employed workforce. Women, and elderly people, were increasingly taking on the tasks which men were abandoning. By the mid-1980s it was estimated that women were responsible for 75 per cent of agricultural work in the Occupied Territories (Warnock, 1990:105) and

In general, the part played by women in the economy has been increasingly to fill the gaps left by male migrant labourers who have moved into higher-paid sectors of the economy (Graham-Brown, 1979:17).

This has meant that day labourers in Israel have been able to continue to work for relatively low wages because of the level of economic support provided by female members of the household.

The emergence of the West Bank and Gaza Strip as one of Israel's major export markets was predicated upon the systematic stifling of any indigenous industrial development. As has been mentioned already, the percentage of the West Bank workforce employed in local industry actually fell between 1970 and 1984, while the contribution of the industrial sector to the GDP of the West Bank also declined. The proximity of the Palestinian market, and its supply of cheap labour, meant that the flood of consumer goods which came onto the market was affordable to a sizable proportion of the population. As Ryan states, the Occupied Territories became an easy dumping ground for shoddy goods and excess production (Ryan, 1979:3). The Occupied Territories were dependent upon imports: in 1985 imports amounted to 77 per cent of the GNP of the West Bank and 148 per cent in the Gaza Strip. In total, 90 per cent of these imports came from Israel (Saleh, 1990:47). In effect, the wages of Palestinian migrant workers in Israel were spent on purchasing Israeli imported goods in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

There is another aspect of the economic exploitation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip which should be mentioned: the exploitation of the area's natural resources. However, the expropriation of land (by 1990 some 60 per cent of the West Bank, excluding East Jerusalem, and 40 per cent of the Gaza Strip)², and the manipulation of

water resources for the benefit of Israel and Israeli settlements, represents more than just another facet of Israel's economic exploitation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Land expropriation and the growth and development of Israel's settlements in the Occupied Territories lie at the very heart of the ideological and political battle for control over the region. However, this is not to say that land expropriation does not have direct and obvious economic consequences.

The main impact has been felt in the agricultural sector with the loss of farming, grazing and orchard land. For example, by the early 1980s

the village of Beit Dajan [overlooking the Jordan Valley] has lost an estimated 80 per cent of its prime land and as a result 90 per cent of its population has lost its livelihood. In the nearby village of Beit Furik an estimated 60 per cent of its land holdings were seized or closed off for the colony of Mekhora - 80 per cent of the village population has become totally or partially landless (Matar, 1984:130).

Examples like these abound - as the level of land expropriation would clearly suggest. The loss of land on such a massive scale has served to accelerate the changes in employment patterns already mentioned, so that as villagers have lost their land through expropriation they have added to the numbers of unskilled migrant workers in Israel. The other major consequence of land expropriation has been the loss of land for housing and industrial development, which is further buttressed by a variety of military orders restricting and preventing the majority of construction projects proposed by Palestinians⁶. (The type of building work which gets permission from the

Israeli authorities tends to be luxury housing, while affordable accommodation is in extremely short supply. Similarly, it is very difficult to get a building permit for any developmental project whether social or industrial.)

Israel's control of water resources has had a serious impact upon agriculture in the West Bank. Limits on water available for irrigation have resulted in high seasonal fluctuations in crop production, and affected crop choices and the expected yield. Many wells have dried up altogether because of the sinking of deep bore wells for adjacent settlements. In addition, the Israeli authorities have pegged the level of water consumption for the Palestinian population at 1967 levels. In the West Bank this means that the Palestinian population has access to only 23 per cent of the available water resources (Samara, 1988:82). In contrast, the water allocated to Israeli settlers has increased one hundred fold:

Overall, in the West Bank, including both agricultural and domestic use, a Jewish settler enjoys approximately nine times as much water as a Palestinian. In the Gaza Strip the disparity of treatment is even greater. A combined agricultural and domestic consumption for the average Israeli settler is something between 14-28,000 cubic metres, while for the average Gazan it is 200 cubic metres (McDowall, 1987:21).

In general terms then, twenty years of Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip effectively tied their economies to that of Israel. This process was aided by the structural weaknesses which were already evident when Israel occupied the areas. As a result Israel was able to derive considerable economic benefit from the continued occupation of the West Bank and Gaza - both in terms of a

major export market for its goods, and as a source of cheap labour for its own economy. Furthermore, this economic weakness inevitably had political and social ramifications for the Palestinian population of the Occupied Territories.

Military Control and the Civil Administration.

The political and social repression of the occupation served the initial objective of ensuring Israeli control over the area. The essential features of the mechanisms of Israeli control consisted of a variety of political and social measures aimed against both the individual and particular sections of society. The Emergency Defence Regulations (1936) were resurrected to allow for detention without charge or trial, deportation, house arrest, curfew, house demolition, and trial by military court (Cattan, 1988:213).

In addition, some 2000 military orders have been promulgated, and identity cards, permits, licences and tax receipts govern the most basic activities for the occupied population. Backed up by the full weight of military dominance, they were able to ensure the day-to-day control of the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The Israelis also used their control over the granting of permits for travel and building to attempt to foster a 'client' group of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. There were more direct attempts to create an 'alternative' Palestinian leadership in the form of such ill-fated schemes as the Village Leagues ⁷.

Under the direction of Menachim Milson, who became the first head of the civil administration in November 1981, Israeli policy in the Occupied Territories followed a twin-track approach. On the one hand, the PLO was to be militarily crushed, and on the other, the social base of the nationalist movement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip should be challenged, with the long-term aim of denuding the nationalists of their support.

The first part of this strategy was exemplified by the policies of the 'iron fist' in the Occupied Territories (violent suppression of nationalist leadership and of acts of resistance), and by the invasion of Lebanon in 1982, which aimed at the destruction of the PLO as a viable national movement. The second aspect of the policy required the fostering of an alternative to the nationalist leadership of local initiatives like the National Guidance Council.

For this purpose the Israelis sponsored the establishment of the Village Leagues, with the aim of incorporating conservative elements within rural society into the Israeli sphere of influence. Unsurprisingly, local notables, and members of the leading Palestinian families refused to have anything to do with the Village Leagues, and so this 'alternative' leadership was dependent upon:

socially marginal and politically ostracized elements among the peasantryItinerant laborers, drifters, former members of the British police force and the Jordanian mukhabarat, land brokers...and village transport workers constitute main sources for league recruits (Tamari, 1984, 383).

The Israelis attempted to bolster the position of the Leagues by giving them access to money and to the Israeli administration. However, the lack of credibility of those

involved in the leagues, and the obvious nature of Israeli participation, meant that for the Palestinian population in general they were perceived as being collaborationist.

Certain sections of Palestinian society - such as the *mukhtars*, and subsequently the labour- and sub-contractors, and sections of the old bourgeoisie - often inhabited a grey area in their dealings with the occupying forces as the nature of their business required them to reach some sort of *modus vivendi* with the Israelis. Within these relations economic necessity, political advantage and personal inclination all played their part.

For the majority of the population, the salient features of Israeli repression were the constant daily harassments which had to be overcome in order to do the simplest of things, the collective punishments of curfews, school closures, mass arrests, and the prohibition on any form of public political protest or organisation ^a. Having stamped their control over the population of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the supplementary aim of Israeli policies in the Occupied Territories was to ensure that nothing arose to disturb that control.

Palestinian Responses to Israeli Occupation.

In the wake of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967, mass civil unrest and armed resistance erupted in Gaza. This was not finally crushed until 1971, and even then the following year saw widespread demonstrations in the refugee camps.

In the West Bank there was also an active campaign of civil disobedience. Representatives of the pro-Jordanian elite met at al-Aqsa Mosque shortly after the occupation to protest against the annexation of East Jerusalem. They, along with various religious dignitaries, established the Islamic Supreme Council. As well as the pro-Jordanian figures, there were five representatives of the political opposition (i.e. the Ba'athists, Communists and Arab National Movement) (Sahliyah, 1988:33).

The membership of the Islamic Council was decimated by deportations; both the pro-Jordanian leaders and the more radical activists were affected by this policy. Those deported included the President of the Islamic Council, the Mayor of Jerusalem, and the Director of the Arab Land Bank. The Council's involvement in the civil disobedience movement dwindled correspondingly. As a result, the High Committee for National Guidance was formed. Although it drew its membership from the same social strata as the Council, it took a more activist approach to resisting the occupation.

Israel suppressed the civil disobedience campaign through the deportation of its prominent leaders. In December 1967 the three members of the committee set up to coordinate resistance activity - Kamal Nasir, a journalist, lawyer Ibrahim Bakr and the communist leader Faiq Warrad - were deported (Lesch, 1979:109). Between September 1967 and December 1970, 514 people were deported (Sahliyah, 1988:33). Other measures employed against the resistance to the occupation included house arrest, administrative detention and house demolition. The UNRWA Annual report for 1968-69 describes the situation in the following terms:

As the period of occupation lengthened and the prospect of a settlement seemed to recede, demonstrations, strikes and bomb explosions became more frequent and led to counter-measures by the Israeli military authorities, such as detention, deportation and, in cases of alleged complicity in violence, the blowing up of houses. (4-5).

At the same time there were several large-scale arrests of PLO cells in the West Bank and in 1970 the PLO was defeated in Jordan (Gilmour, 1982:171-3). These events combined to dampen political activity in the West Bank. The crushing of the PLO by Jordan no doubt had a severely damaging effect on the image of Jordan in the Occupied Territories, but at the same time it hardly served to enhance the position of the PLO either.

PLO strategy concerning Palestine was to continue to espouse armed struggle for the liberation of all Palestine and the creation of a democratic secular state. It was not until 1974 that the current of thought began to admit other strands in the form of an interim solution which would allow for the establishment of a Palestinian state on any territory liberated from Israeli control (Cobban, 1990a:60).

The Declining Influence of the Pro-Jordanian Elite.

In 1972 municipal elections in the West Bank saw pro-Jordanian councils elected in most places. This was in part a reflection of the political weakness of the PLO, but more particularly of the limited franchise under which the elections were held. However, these elections could not conceal the decline of the pro-Jordanian elite, assailed by a variety of social and economic factors

which were to undermine its political position. Early attempts by the Israelis to co-opt the traditional landowning elite proved largely unsuccessful since they "had relatively little to offer this class in the way of rewards" (Graham-Brown, 1984b:229). The occupation had a detrimental effect upon the sectors of the economy that were controlled by this elite⁹. At the same time, 'new money' in the form of day wages from labourers in Israel and remittances from abroad, had served to undermine their position still further. The kind of political patronage they had enjoyed under Jordanian rule was no longer available to shore up their position against the rapid social and economic changes that were affecting the West Bank and Gaza Strip under occupation.

The 1973 October War¹⁰ further damaged Jordan's standing in the Occupied Territories because of its failure to join the fighting. In 1974 the Arab League recognised the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people (thus further undermining Jordan's influence over the West Bank and, by extension, weakening the role of the pro-Jordanian elite). The same year also saw the PLO gain observer status at the United Nations. The PLO itself began to refine its political and military strategy to suit the changing circumstances. As a result of these factors, support for the PLO increased dramatically during this period - a trend that was assisted by the formation of the Palestine National Front in 1973.

The Palestine National Front.

The PNF was established in August 1973. It was an indigenous response to escalating Israeli oppression in the Occupied Territories and to the civil war in Jordan which had resulted in the PLO's expulsion from the country. It brought together representatives of political groups, professional bodies, trade unions and popular organisations and leading nationalist personalities (Shuaibi, 1980:115). Although its membership was drawn primarily from the same social strata as the older traditional elite, they represented a younger leadership, avowedly pro-nationalist, pro-PLO in its standpoint. They reflected the shift in political activity away from the pro-Jordanian elites, who had dominated local politics prior to 1967, towards the urban professionals and educated upper middle class.

The 1973 October war, as well as damaging Jordan's standing among Palestinians, did much to boost the "general climate of nationalism throughout the West Bank and all the occupied territories" (Shuaibi, 1980:115). The PNF was part of this development; its creation was both a reflection of the PLO's growing legitimacy, and a spur to its consolidation of political support.

The PNF gave public support to the PLO and organised a number of non-violent mass protests and campaigns, for which it was able to depend on widespread support. For example, it led campaigns against land expropriation and sales, highlighted the conditions of Palestinian prisoners, and organised mass demonstrations against the deportation of eight leading activists in December 1973. It also led a boycott of the municipal elections in Jerusalem, participation in which would have appeared to

lend legitimacy to Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem (Aruri,1984:11).

In addition to these activities the PNF participated in the debate within Palestinian circles on the political programme of the PLO. It provided a prominent voice in favour of adopting an interim programme which would support the establishment of a Palestinian state on any part of the land liberated from Israeli control (Shuaibi,1980:117).

As well as coinciding with positive external political events, this upsurge in resistance activity was also influenced by a declining economic situation. This period saw a dramatic increase in inflation combined with a growth in out-migration and a peaking of the number of Palestinians employed inside Israel ¹¹. It also marked a rapid growth in settlement activity in the central West Bank in areas of high population density - something which had generally been avoided previously.

The PNF was eventually overtaken by factional politics and attempts by the PLO to undermine its position. This was largely due to the strength of the communists (who were not at that time represented on the PNC) within the PNF and the fear that it might have developed the attributes of an independent local political leadership (Sahliyah,1988:60-61). At the same time, Israel's concerted repression of PNF activities from 1974 onwards, and its attacks on the leadership (including the arrest of over 300 activists and the deportation of 17 of its leaders (Sahliyah,1988:62)) meant that by mid-1977 it was no longer able to represent a viable political force.

The National Guidance Council.

In 1977 the Likud Party ¹² came to power in Israel and the following year saw the signing of the Camp David Accords by Israel and Egypt ¹³. In response to this new situation, the NGC was established by the mayors and representatives of professional organisations, trade unions, women's and youth organisations. Essentially, the NGC took over where the PNF left off. It decided to act as an open body and confine its activities to the political realm. It issued appeals and memoranda on specific issues, organised protest demonstrations and generally acted as the official nationalist voice in the Occupied Territories. As such it organised the opposition, to the Camp David Accords, which was so violently suppressed by the Israelis.

The leadership of the NGC was drawn from the economically frustrated educated middle class professionals. Initially, the Israeli government, under the suggestion of Ezer Weizman (then defence minister),

decided to allow the National Guidance Committee to operate to encourage its members to become Israel's partners in the talks on autonomy (Sahliyah, 1988:82).

However, this standpoint did not last very long, and by 1980 the Israelis were adopting similar tactics against the NGC as they had against the PNF:

When curfews and collective punishments failed to weaken the resistance and stem the dissent in the aftermath of the Camp David affair, the occupation regime began a systematic campaign to get rid of the leadership in the municipalities (Aruri, 1984:18).

The result of this was the dismissal of most of the mayors and the deportation of four of them. In addition, the attacks by Israeli settlers on Bassam Shaka (mayor of Nablus) and Karim Khalaf (mayor of Ramallah) in 1980 added a new dimension to the nature of the repression (Gilmour, 1982:220).

The 'iron fist' policies of Menachem Milson (governor of the West Bank, 1981-2, during the institution of the 'civil administration'¹⁴) led to the banning of the NGC, and the attempt to foster the Village Leagues as an alternative leadership to that provided by the nationalist supporters of the PLO. The period of Milson's governorship witnessed the mini-uprising of the months preceding the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. The mass protests and demonstrations against the imposition of the civil administration were brutally suppressed by the Israeli authorities. Demant summarises the situation in the following terms:

Demonstrations in the first months of 1982 resulted in more Arab casualties than had fallen in all previous fifteen years of occupation. West Bank newspapers were closed, as was Bir Zeit University. Houses of relatives of convicted rioters were blown up. The National Guidance Council was outlawed and most city councils dismissed. In what looked like an economic war, many shops, enterprises and farms of Palestinian notables suspected of nationalist sympathies were closed down (Demant, 1984:149).

The Joint Committee.

In 1978, the Joint Committee was established by Jordan and the PLO. The outcome of the Baghdad summit of the Arab League, it was to channel more than \$400m to the Occupied Territories between 1979-85. Initially, the Joint Committee helped to provide funds for hard-pressed

municipal authorities, but as Mustafa Natshe, former acting mayor of Hebron explained:

We informed the authorities, and the Israeli Defence Minister at the time [1979], Ezer Weizman, raised no objections. Late in 1982, however, the authorities told us that we were no longer allowed to bring these funds in. The authorities know that the funds are registered in the municipal budget are spent on municipal projects, like building schools, roads, and electrical and water projects (Egan, 1984:50).

The clamp-down by the Israeli authorities upon the entry of money into the Occupied Territories, only served to exacerbate the problems of Joint Committee funding outlined by Samara, and suggested that there might be a degree of implicit understanding between the Israeli and Jordanian authorities about the use of Joint Committee assistance:

Most of the Committee's money is channeled to and through traditional pro-Jordanian figures, a fact which resulted in an increase in the cash money in the hands of those people and which in the end increases their ability to consume Israeli goods. The share of agriculture and industry of the money spent by the Joint Committee was 4.7% (Samara, 1988:135).

The way in which Joint Committee money was allocated became a major bone of contention within the national movement in the Occupied Territories. Those on the left of the political spectrum opposed the way in which funds were used to shore up support for conservative, pro-Fatah, pro-Jordanian elements.

In the fifteen years of Israeli military occupation prior to 1982 considerable economic and social changes had taken place in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Employment in Israel had become commonplace (as had emigration for

work in the Gulf states and elsewhere). As a result of this the economies of the West Bank and Gaza were largely dependent upon remittances from abroad. In turn these remittances were spent on goods imported from Israel. The fact that migrant labour had assumed such a central role in the economy also meant that families were separated for long periods (with all the implications that might have for social control and familial relations), and that women were playing an increasingly important role in the local economy.

There was also a rapid expansion in higher education - five Palestinian universities were established during this period. This was particularly important for women who, for the first time in sizable numbers, had access to university education.

During the same period, the PLO had become the undisputed expression of the national movement and had fundamentally shaped the nature and direction of the liberation struggle.

However, despite all these changes, the nature of political opposition to Israeli rule in the Occupied Territories had remained remarkably consistent. Although the pro-Jordanian elites had been eclipsed in the early 1970s by more avowedly nationalist elements, the social composition of the public political opposition changed little. The membership of the PNF and the NGC were broadly the same - upper-middle class urban professionals (many of whom were scions of the large landowning families which traditionally had been more sympathetic towards Jordan). Sectors of society which had perhaps been most affected by the changes wrought by the

occupation - women, youth, students, and workers - found little opportunity to participate within these political forms. This was also reflected in the nature of political activity which had more to do with elite representational politics than with the politics of mass mobilisation.

Palestinian Resistance after 1982.

The effects of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon reverberated throughout the region. The invasion highlighted the lack of leadership within the Arab world; Egypt having been successfully removed from the equation by the Camp David Accords, the invasion of Lebanon was the next logical step in the Israeli programme of destroying the PLO and creating a buffer of quisling states along its borders ¹⁸.

The impotence of the Arab world in the face of the invasion only served to further undermine the advocates of Arab nationalism. This, combined with the activities of the Iranian-backed militias in the Lebanon, and their resistance in the south of the country during the mid-1980s, gave a corresponding boost to the standing of neo-Islamic movements in the Middle East.

1982 marked another major watershed in the development of Palestinian resistance. The Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the removal of the PLO from the country and the destruction of its military base had major repercussions for resistance in the Occupied Territories. Similarly, the outbreak of fighting among the different Palestinian forces in Tripoli and the subsequent siege of the camps left the external leadership in an extremely embattled position, and increased the sense of isolation felt by Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. It also

produced a further negative spin-off in the form of an upsurge in factionalism which in many ways mirrored the conflict in Lebanon.

The period of the early/mid-1980s was marked by several notable features in the development of resistance in the West Bank and Gaza. Two of them had their roots in the late-1970s but were given a boost by the events of the early-1980s: they were the growth of the Islamicist movement (particularly strong in Gaza), and the development of a number of committees and grass-roots organisations among professional groups, women, students and trade unions.

The committees and the Islamicist movements represented different manifestations of similar new responses to regional and national events. They both emphasised the active mobilisation of sectors of society which had previously been marginal to the political process in the Occupied Territories. The committees were established largely by the new generation of university graduates. Women played a prominent role in these initiatives; for many it was their first opportunity to create collective structures outside the confines of the home environment.

Likewise, the Islamicists concentrated their activities on young people - high school pupils and university students. This concentration upon organising young people was a natural development given that nearly 60 per cent of the population of the West Bank and Gaza Strip was under the age of twenty (Fasheh, 1984:295). The establishment of the five local universities was a major factor in the success of these new movements as it

provided them with an organisational structure from which to operate and to disseminate their views.

The committees and trade unions appealed to a wider social spectrum than had been involved in previous political initiatives, attempting to harness the aspirations of emerging classes and generations to active support for the national movement. The Islamicists appealed to the same sectors of society but sought to exploit the apparent weakness of the national movement in the wake of the invasion of Lebanon by proffering an Islamic solution to the 'national question'.

The third factor of note when considering the changing nature of opposition to the occupation in the early/mid-1980s was the steady increase in the number of acts of resistance carried out by individuals or small groups acting independently. For example, in 1985 there were 933 recorded instances of protest against the occupation; this rose to 1,358 in 1986, and 2,982 in 1987 (by comparison the first year of the Intifada saw 23,092 instances of protest according to General Aryeh Shiloah) (Sayigh, 1989:23-32). This would seem to suggest that during this period the various PLO factions were relatively weak on the ground in the Occupied Territories, but that at the same time there was a sense of the need to oppose the occupation forces by whatever means were available. Some might contend that the increase in individual acts of resistance was indicative of a sense of despair at both the apparent permanence of the occupation and the disarray of the Palestinian forces (see, for example, Punamaki, 1990).

The Committees.

The social changes which had taken place under Israeli occupation had not found an adequate voice in either the PNF or the NGC, and yet they had served to increase the potential significance in the political equation of newly emergent sectors of Palestinian society.

Commenting on the development of the committees as political players in the early-1980s, Graham-Brown says:

The political organisations, unable to act in their own names, put forward their lines within various legalised entities. The municipalities were the most important until 1982, but now their destruction as democratic institutions is virtually complete. Unions, professional associations, student groups and local cultural and sports organisations have thus become arenas for political competition and mobilization (Graham-Brown, 1983:5).

The Communists had led the way in the development of grass-roots organisations in the late-1970s. They were soon joined by the Popular and Democratic Fronts and Fateh ¹⁶ who recognised the potential significance of organising sectors of society such as workers, women and students. While the growth of committees, trade unions and student organisations along factional lines did inevitably lead to competition, duplication of resources and the corresponding neglect of development in other areas, it provided a basis for concrete political mobilisation and organisation. Behind the multiplicity of paper organisations and committees there was a foundation of solid organisational work which, however limited in comparison with the exaggerated claims of some partisan spokespersons, was far in advance of what had existed previously. They provided a potential opportunity to bridge the gap between the Palestinian leadership of the

notables and the participants in demonstrations and civil resistance.

The growth of the committees came in the wake of the rapid expansion of university education in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the mid/late-1970s, and the almost endemic rates of graduate underemployment and unemployment that it produced. The systematic stifling of economic development in the Occupied Territories, the expropriation of land, and the non-development of an indigenous social and administrative infrastructure meant that employment opportunities for graduates were extremely limited.

This generation of graduates were also those who had experienced the radicalisation of student politics and the introduction of schemes like the community work programme at Bir Zeit University which required students to do 120 hours of community work before graduation ¹⁷. In addition, many of the leading student activists had spent time in prison, which tended to have a further radicalising effect. As a result there was a sizable number of well-educated and committed activists who were easily absorbed into the emerging committee structures.

The universities had also served to bring people together across class and gender barriers, and to bridge the gulf between urban, rural and refugee society. The founding members of the committees hoped that they would be able to extend these social contacts and give them substance in democratic organisational structures. However, how far it is possible to overthrow social custom in the span of a decade is another matter, and one which will be considered subsequently. Nonetheless, the basic ideas of

an alternative form of political and social organisation which allowed for active mass participation, were being articulated.

With a focus on the practical daily problems of occupation, the committees, at least in theory, emphasised the importance of empowerment as an organisational principle and attempted to challenge the hierarchical structures of previous bodies.

As such the committees were an indigenous political development despite their allegiances to the various political factions which were under external leadership. In this way the committees attempted to provide an alternative approach to the promotion of *sumud* (or steadfastness) which was to challenge the strategies of Jordan and the PLO.

There were three principle areas of committee organisation: vocational-specific committees (e.g. medical relief committees, agricultural relief committees and trade unions); women's committees; and student and youth groups. In all these areas organisations emerged along factional lines so that each of the four political blocs (Fateh, PFLP, DFLP, Communists) developed their own parallel structures.

Because of their factional base and the nature of their work in strengthening practical *sumud* by attempting to provide basic facilities and moral, political and social support for ordinary Palestinians living under occupation, it was clear that the Israeli authorities would consider their activities as being essentially political in nature. This assumption was seen in the

introduction of the 'iron fist' policies of 1985 which were largely directed against leading activists in the committees and trade unions. Because of the organisational diffuseness of these structures the repression did not succeed in decapitating them in the same way as the PNF and NGC had been.

Of the various organisations the women's and student ones were politically the most significant. The importance of the women's committees lay in the fact that they were attempting to organise a previously neglected, socially diffuse, yet increasingly crucial sector of society. For the economic and social policies of the Israelis had thrust women to the centre stage in terms of their economic role and their importance as providers of familial and social stability. As a result, any attempt to organise women was bound to be of political significance.

The student blocs were important because of the role of the universities (particularly Bir Zeit and An-Najah) as providers of a focus for nationalist activity against the occupation. The student unions were virtually the only elected Palestinian bodies operating in any form in the Occupied Territories after 1982. As a result great efforts were put into political organisation among students. This was given a considerable boost after 1985 when many of the long-term prisoners released in the prisoner exchange became students¹⁰. Student politics also provided a useful introduction to wider political organisation; as graduates returned to their home towns and villages many of them re-emerged as community leaders during the Intifada.

In the early months of the Intifada the prominence of local activists who had been involved in one or other of the committees emphasised their organisational importance in terms of providing a form and structure for anti-occupation activity and a training ground for a new generation of political activists. It also suggested that the committees might have the potential to provide political coherence and direction to the popular uprising of the Intifada.

The Islamic Movement.

The Islamicist movement emerged in force initially in Gaza and then in conservative areas of the West Bank, such as Hebron. The 1970s and early-1980s saw the Muslim Brotherhood ¹⁹ operate in Gaza with virtual impunity; in fact they received widespread tacit encouragement from the occupation forces who saw them as a convenient conservative counterweight to the radicalism of the nationalists (Shadid, 1988:674-5).

The Muslim Brotherhood concentrated much of its recruitment strategy upon the young - and was particularly active in schools, colleges and universities:

Therefore it is not surprising that the majority of the Brotherhood's members seem to be young, mostly from the lower income groups, and with a rural background. However, the leadership comes predominantly from the urban areas, is largely of upper middle income background and tends to be heavily involved in commerce (Shadid, 1988:666).

The real growth of the movement came in the early 1980s and it enjoyed several advantages over its secularist counterpart. The Iranian revolution provided a succesful,

and at that time, widely applauded, role-model for an Islamic movement. This is not to suggest that the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Occupied Territories advocated adopting similar strategies; in the eyes of the Israelis, their attraction as a moderating force was largely as a result of the lack of their political activism. They mainly concerned themselves with the propagation of 'correct' forms of behaviour in relation to, for instance, Islamic dress, social mixing and religious education.

Nonetheless, for Palestinians living under occupation, a successful Islamic revolution did provide an alternative vision of political action to the hitherto dominance of the secular nationalist perspective. The Islamic movement also had the advantage of being based upon a readily understood ideology that formed the core of accepted popular culture. For the most part, Palestinian society was not secular (and this was particularly so in Gaza); the popular culture was imbued with Islamic sentiments despite, perhaps because of, the social changes that dislocation and occupation had brought.

The Islamic movements were able to draw upon aspects of this consciousness in order to create a new version of Islamic 'orthodoxy' that provided answers to political questions and exploited the apparent weakness of the strategies of the various secular nationalist groups. The fact that they came to prominence in the 1980s at a time when the national movement was seen to have been fundamentally weakened by the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the inter-Palestinian fighting which erupted subsequently, would seem to suggest that the level of support and sympathy they enjoyed increased with the

discomfiture of the national movement. This trend was given added impetus by the pseudo-religious language and justifications employed by elements within the Israeli governments of the period, and by the settler movement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The Islamic Jihad ²⁰ emerged in 1979 and advocated a much more radical approach to political action. In contrast to the Brotherhood, who regarded the contradiction with the nationalist forces as being the primary one, Islamic Jihad advocated immediate action against the occupation forces (Shadid, 1988:674). In keeping with these priorities, Islamic Jihad supported the PLO. Their military operations won them widespread support (even among the secular nationalist forces), and their present alliance with the Popular Front illustrates the degree to which Islamic and secularist trends coexist within the national movement ²¹. This is also shown by the strong Islamic strand within Fateh²².

Although in theory the Islamicist and secular nationalist movements represent distinct and incompatible strands, in practice they often overlap, both in the form of tactical alliances and, perhaps more importantly, in terms of popular perceptions of the national struggle.

In a 1986 opinion poll questions on the type of government preferred in any Palestinian state solicited the following responses: 26.5 per cent favoured a 'state based on Islamic law'; 29.6 per cent 'a state based on Arab nationalism and Islam'; 10.4 per cent a 'democratic secular' state; and 21.1 per cent a 'democratic Palestinian' state. When the figures were analysed it was found that while those favouring a full-fledged Islamic

state were more likely to be illiterate and over the age of 40, those who favoured any of the other three options cut across all sections of society (Shadid and Seltzer, 1988).

In the immediate run-up to the Intifada, in contrast to Islamic Jihad, the Muslim Brotherhood found themselves increasingly discredited in the eyes of the wider public. This was due to the perceived tolerance with which they were regarded by the Israelis, and to their attacks on nationalist groups - particularly within the arena of student politics. They were caught out by the Intifada - not supporting it until 1988 when they re-emerged under the name of HAMAS (an acronym for Islamic Resistance Movement). By comparison, in Gaza, Islamic Jihad was involved in armed clashes with the Israeli army, and organised demonstrations at the Islamic University in the couple of months preceeding the outbreak of the Intifada (Shadid, 1988:678). During the Intifada, HAMAS has continued to pursue its own agenda. By taking advantage of the call for unity among all Palestinian forces, they have been able to impose their own strike days separate from those called by UNLU (The United National Leadership of the Uprising), and in Gaza they have been at the forefront of the campaign to impose the *hijab* ²³ upon women.

Conclusion.

The Occupied Territories have undergone a process of rapid social and economic change, much of which is common to the experience of other third world countries. However, the Israeli occupation limited the potential for indigenous adaptation and exaggerated the emphasis on external factors - particularly labour migration and

immigration - in the process of social transformation. Since 1967 the nature of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip can be seen to have had a direct bearing upon the nature of Palestinian resistance. The use of overwhelming force to ensure the continuance of the occupation has meant that the military option has never been a central feature of resistance in the Occupied Territories (with the possible exception of Gaza before 1971).

The suppression by Israel of attempts at legitimate political organisation in the form of the Palestine National Front, the National Guidance Council, and the elected mayors and councils, was a factor in the emergence of the committees as the organisational model of resistance. In addition, the repression of these political institutions meant that the Palestinian institutions that were established during the occupation and managed to survive, took on an important symbolic role as repositories of national aspirations.

The political economy of the occupation ensured the centrality of the land question in the struggle for national self-determination. It likewise contributed towards the perceived need to organise Palestinian labour around the nationalist cause.

At the time of the Israeli occupation in 1967, the economies of the West Bank and Gaza Strip were already weak, depending upon an agricultural sector which was unable to sustain the dramatic increase in population which had resulted from the dispossession of the Palestinians in 1948. The high levels of underemployment and unemployment in the agricultural sector, coupled with

the lack of industrial development, meant that remittances from migrant labour formed an increasingly important part of the GNP of the areas from the 1960s onwards. With the consolidation of the occupation large numbers of Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza went to work in Israel as well as in the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia, to the point where less than 50 per cent of the workforce was employed within the Occupied Territories.

The Joint Committee funds, and the notion of *sumud* which they promoted, reinforced these trends by encouraging a form of material consumption as a substitute for political action and economic development.

The continued dependency upon external remittances - whether from the Joint Committee, aid agencies, or migrant labour - and upon Israeli imports, meant that the economies of the West Bank and Gaza Strip were further undermined in the course of the occupation. In the long run it resulted in increased labour migration - particularly of the skilled and educated. Conversely, once the oil boom in the Gulf states came to an end in the mid-1980s, the Palestinians of the Occupied Territories were even more dependent on work in Israel.

The effect of this dependency upon external sources of income also had social implications. As increasing numbers of men were away from home for long periods, women had to take up the role of head of the household and assume much of the less profitable work at home. Many small family plots were tended mainly by female labour. At the same time, greater numbers of women were moving outside the home for either work or education in a way which would not have been conceivable twenty years

earlier. Thus, although the West Bank, and particularly Gaza, remained socially conservative, economic necessity and education were producing new opportunities for women to move outside the domestic environment.

At the same time, the size of the Palestinian workforce in Israel - the majority of whom came from the countryside - was becoming an important factor in the social equation. Although they remained largely unorganised (indeed there were almost insuperable obstacles to their effective organisation)²⁴ nevertheless, they represented a major economic element in Israeli-Palestinian relations in the Occupied Territories.

Similarly, with the advent of the Palestinian universities, and given the young age profile of the population of the Occupied Territories, the potential role of youth in the resistance movement was of increasing importance to both Israelis and Palestinians.

It was these three groups in particular - women, workers and youth - that the committees were designed to organise.

Subsequent chapters will consider to what extent women were effectively organised and mobilised. In particular, the nature of women's participation in the national movement, and the relationship between national and social issues will be examined with reference to changes in the education, employment, health and familial status of women.

NOTES

- ¹ The Intifada - or Uprising - started in December 1987.
- ² One dunam is equal to just under a quarter of an acre, or 1,000 square metres.
- ³ For details on the dependency of the Palestinian economy on Israeli imports see Saleh, 1990:45.
- ⁴ Family members who were included in the census could apply for 'non-resident' relatives to be readmitted to the territories under the family reunification scheme. There are no comprehensive official figures available about the number of applications for family reunification which have been submitted since 1967, but according to Yitzak Rabin, between 1967 and 1987, 85,000 applications had been made. In 1979 Meron Benvenisti suggested that there were 150,000 unprocessed applications, while official Israeli sources quote figures of between 45-50,000 successful applications - thus suggesting that the majority of cases are turned down (Whittome, 1990:4).
- ⁵ These figures are based upon my own running total of land expropriations as recorded in the Israeli and Arab press, and the figures produced by Benvenisti (1986). A 1991 'Report of the Co-ordinating Committee of International NGOs in Jerusalem' placed the figures at 65 per cent of the West Bank and 50 per cent of the Gaza Strip.
- ⁶ For details of Israeli military orders governing land confiscation, land use and construction, see Shehadeh (1985).
- ⁷ For information on the Village Leagues see Tamari (1984:377-390).
- ⁸ This will be dealt with in the section concerning the Palestinian response to the occupation.
- ⁹ See above for details.
- ¹⁰ The October 1973 war was launched by Egypt and Syria in an attempt to retake some of the land occupied by Israel in 1967 as a bargaining position during subsequent negotiations. For further details see Gilmour (1982:174-5); Mansfield (1978:359-68).
- ¹¹ See above for details.

¹² The Likud Party is a coalition of three right-wing groups. For a brief history of the Likud see Greilsammer (1986:65-72).

¹³ The Camp David Accords signed by Israel and Egypt allowed for a peace agreement between the two countries, and for separate provisions for the establishment of autonomy in the Occupied Territories. It was hotly rejected by the PLO, which was not involved in the negotiations, and by most of the Arab states, leading to an Arab boycott of Egypt. See Cobban (1990a:97-104).

¹⁴ The 'civil administration' was introduced in 1981. Staffed by army personnel it was supposed to implement the 'self-governing institutions' envisaged in the Camp David Accords (McDowall, 1987:20).

¹⁵ For the development of this argument see, for example, Chomsky (1983).

¹⁶ The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and Fateh were the main organisations within the PLO. Of these Fateh was by far the largest.

¹⁷ The community work programme included such things as helping with the olive harvest, clearing ground for planting, repairing communal buildings and cleaning public spaces.

¹⁸ The prisoner exchange was arranged between the PFLP-GC and Israel.

¹⁹ The Muslim Brotherhood was set up in the late 1920s by Hassan al-Banna, as a reformist, anti-colonial Islamic movement. By the late 1940s it was estimated to have half a million members. The Brotherhood was established in Palestine in the 1940s and raised a militia to fight in the 1948 war. After the partition of Palestine the Brotherhood survived in the West Bank thanks to a tacit agreement with the Hashemites (Mortimer, 1982:252-8). In Gaza, their position was rather more problematic due to the conflicting interests of the Nasserists and the Brotherhood (see, for example, Hart, 1989:82-105). For further information on the Muslim Brotherhood, see Mortimer, 1982; Kepel, 1985; and Montgomery Watt, 1989.

²⁰ Islamic Jihad was closer in thinking to Iran than the Muslim Brotherhood.

²¹ In April 1991, George Habash, leader of the PFLP, attended the inaugural meeting of the Popular Arab and

Islamic Conference, formed in Khartoum, and headed by Hassan al-Turabi, the radical Islamicist Sudanese leader (*Sudan Update*, 13 May 1991:2). Barghouti(1993:12) comments on PFLP-Hamas co-operation in the Occupied Territories.

²² Many of Fateh's leading members were one-time members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Mortimer(1982:259) places Yasser Arafat as a member of the Brotherhood in the early 1950s (although Arafat himself has denied this). He also says that Abu Jihad was a member of the Brotherhood, and Khalid al-Hassan a founder-member of a group called 'The Party for the Liberation of Islam'. Unlike in the leftist groups within the PLO, Christians were not particularly well represented within Fateh's leadership.

²³ By *hijab* is meant the covering of the head which completely conceals the hair.

²⁴ This point is dealt with in some detail in Chapter 3. See also, Hiltermann (1991).

CHAPTER 2

The Development of Women's Organisations in Palestine

In the previous chapter the nature of the anti-colonial and nationalist movements were examined briefly in the light of socio-economic changes which took place in Palestine. The following chapter seeks to locate the various women's organisations within the context of these wider political movements.

The establishment of the Women's Congress, and societies of the Mandate period, and of the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW) in the 1960s, and the emergence of the women's committees in the late 1970s, will be considered in the light of both the social changes affecting the region, and the politics of the anti-colonial and national movements. In this way the nature of the relationship between the women's and national movements, and the implications of this for the emergence of a women's agenda, either within the nationalist movement, or separate from it, will be examined.

We shall begin by briefly considering the development of the early women's organisations in Palestine which emerged in the 1910s and 1920s as part of the growth of communal-based groups.

The Growth of Communal Organisations.

One of the earliest recorded women's organisations was the Christian Public Charity Society for Ladies in Haifa which was established in 1911 (Haddad, 1980:173 n51). Throughout the 1910s and 1920s other organisations

emerged with similar charitable objectives. Many of these associations were based in Jerusalem, and within the general framework of charitable activity responded to sectarian communal needs. For example, The Society for the Needy and Sick worked within the Greek Orthodox community, while the Mar Mansour Society was a Latin Catholic organisation.

By the end of the 1920s most of the Christian denominations had established their own women's charitable societies. Tsimhoni aptly summarises the nature of these organisations and women's participation in them:

Women's participation in the Christian communal organisations reflects their seclusion in traditional society, though to a lesser extent than Muslim women. Their role in communal life is seen as an extension of their role in the family: caring for the ill, poor and old and catering for communal feasts and celebrations. But women do not share in the leadership of the community (1986: 404).

The 1920s also witnessed a rapid growth in political clubs and organisations in all the main towns of Palestine. These were originally established in the wake of the First World War and the British occupation of Palestine. In 1919 representatives from these various societies, including the Muslim-Christian organisations, held the first All-Palestine Conference and 'supported the inclusion of Palestine in an independent Syria' (Lesch, 1973:14). They also sent a delegation to the First Arab Congress held that year in Damascus.

The establishment of the British Mandate in Palestine in the aftermath of the First World War, necessitated the organisation of political activity among both Arabs and

Jews in Palestine. Both the Zionists and the Arabs were anxious to develop political contacts with the mandate authorities and to show that they were in a position to administer responsible government. The development of Arab political organisations in Palestine was spurred by the activism of the Zionists, and the apparent bias of the mandate authorities in their favour.

The peculiar circumstances of the British mandate and Zionist aspirations, combined to produce a platform which, in general principles, was to form the basis of most political activity in Palestine until 1948. This platform was articulated at the Third Arab Congress held in Haifa in 1920-21 and consisted of the rejection of the Balfour Declaration, an end to mass Zionist immigration, and a call for government on the basis of proportional representation (Khalidi, 1984:85). This marked the advent of non-sectarian, cross-communal Palestinian political organisation. In effect, the political response to Western colonialism was non-communal, affirming instead the Arab character of Palestine.

The Development of Women's Organisations from the 1920s.

A similar pattern of development was followed by women's organisations. In 1919 an Arab ladies association was established in Jerusalem (Mogannam, 1937:55).

In 1921 a Women's Congress was organised by Emilia Sakakini (wife of Khalil Sakakini, secretary to the Arab Executive (Tsimhoni, 1984:181)) and Zleecha Shihaabi¹. The Women's Congress urged anti-British demonstrations and organised committees aimed at opposing Zionist

settlement and British occupation' (Haddad,1980:160). This Congress survived for only two years due to a shortage of money and organisational problems (Kazi, 1987:21), but it provided an institutional model for subsequent organisational initiatives².

During the mid-1920s an economic depression hit the Zionist colonies and the idea that Palestine might be swamped by Zionist immigration suddenly appeared remote (Lesch,1973:28-29). However, things began to change in 1928; immigration increased and the economy improved.

In September 1928 there was an incident at the Wailing Wall on the Day of Atonement³. As a result the Zionists organised a campaign to gain greater rights to the Wall to conduct full religious services. Tensions between Jews and Muslims over access to the site simmered on until August 1929 when a Jewish demonstration at the Wall was followed by a Muslim counter-demonstration the following day. Fighting erupted in Jerusalem and in several other towns and cities in Palestine - including Hebron where 64 members of the old Jewish community were killed and more than fifty injured. By the time the violence ended over 200 Jews and Arabs had been killed (Hirst,1984:70).

The Arab Women's Congress.

These events galvanized the Palestinian political organisations into action. Lesch reports that there was a:

rapid increase in political mobilization among the Arab community. A Women's Congress, an all-Palestine congress, farmers' congresses, and youth congresses followed each other in rapid succession (1973:31).

Mogannam also emphasises the importance of the Wailing Wall disturbances and the British reaction to them, as a catalyst for change, suggesting that the sense of urgency caused by the new situation enabled a women's congress to be organised despite:

the traditional restrictions which, until then, prevented the Arab woman in Palestine from taking part in any movement which might expose her to the public eye (1937:70).

The convening of the First Arab Women's Congress of Palestine in October 1929 was supported by the leaders of the various political groupings - indeed their wives and other close female relatives played a prominent part in proceedings. The Congress was attended by over 200 delegates: in effect it was the counterpart of the Arab Congress.

The Congress adopted a strongly nationalist platform passing resolutions condemning the Balfour Declaration and Zionist immigration, and calling for representative government and a boycott of Jewish goods and businesses. It also resolved to give its full support to the Arab Executive Committee. While the Congress was still in session it sent a delegation to the High Commissioner to inform him of their decisions. Apparently it had been planned to see the High Commissioner's wife, but since their visit was political in nature they were informed that this was not possible, and so they decided 'to ignore all traditional restrictions' and see the High Commissioner (Mogannam;1937:74).

When the delegation returned to the Congress a demonstration was organised to encompass the various foreign consulates in Jerusalem. The demonstration was by

car and 120 cars were used to take the delegates round the route (Mogannam,1937:76). This in itself says something about the nature of participation in this first Congress - that in 1929 some 200 delegates had access to 120 cars.

The Congress also elected an Executive Committee to oversee further activities and promote the resolutions of the Congress. This committee included the wives of the three joint secretaries of the Arab Executive Committee, and the Wives or close relatives of the leaders of four of the political parties that were to be formed in the early/mid-1930s ⁴.

Finally, this First Women's Congress mandated the establishment of Arab Women's Societies in several towns in Palestine. The first of these was set up in Jerusalem. Article 2 of the Society's constitution stated its objectives to be:

to work for the development of the social and economic affairs of the Arab women in Palestine, to endeavour to secure the extension of educational facilities for girls, to use every possible and lawful means to elevate the standing of women, to promote national industries, to assist national institutions, and support any national body in any enterprise which may be beneficial to the country, whether economically, socially or politically (Mogannam,1937:77).

The Arab Women's Society of Jerusalem was chaired by the wife of Jamal Husseini, and one of its first projects was to raise money to buy land for the families of Palestinian prisoners condemned to death in the wake of the Wailing Wall disturbances. They also campaigned for a reprieve for other prisoners, against collective punishments, and for legislative protection for

Palestinian peasants threatened with eviction. Such activities went hand-in-hand with flower days and bazaars and other forms of charitable work.

Other Women's Societies were established in Haifa, Jaffa, Nablus, Tulkarem, Jenin, Acre, Ramallah and Bethlehem as well as in other smaller towns. They were involved in charitable work and girls' education: 'They all join without hesitation in matters of national importance' (Mogannam, 1937:63).

Thus, the traditional charitable activities of these women's organisations had a distinctive political character born out of the fact that the Women's Societies and the Executive Committee of the Women's Congress worked in tandem with the Executive Committee of the Arab Congress. The degree of cooperation was no doubt enhanced by the close family ties between the memberships of the two Executive Committees.

The 1933 Boycott.

In 1933 frustration at the lack of progress towards a political settlement, together with the rapidly rising level of Zionist immigration and the arming of Zionist colonies, resulted in the Arab Executive's call for non-cooperation with the mandate government. The visits of Lord Allenby and the Colonial Secretary, Lord Swinton were boycotted. The Arab Women's Committee decided to hold a demonstration in protest at these visits, despite the fact that all public demonstrations had been banned since 1929.

The demonstration went from the offices of the Women's Executive Committee to the Masjid of Omar and then onto the Holy Sepulchre. At the mosque Matiel Mogannam addressed the crowd - the first time that a Christian woman had spoken from the pulpit of the mosque - and Mrs Abdel Hadi spoke at the Holy Sepulchre (Mogannam, 1937:95-99).

This provides an example of the way in which women's organisations were able often to take on public activities which could not have been undertaken by the wider anti-colonial movement. This was an aspect of the relationship between the national movement and the women's organisations in Palestine which continued to be of significance 50 years later.

Tension continued to rise throughout the summer of 1933, and swept along by public opinion, the Arab Executive called a general strike in October. To mark the strike, a demonstration was organised in Jerusalem. Members of the Women's Societies and Executive Committee participated in the demonstration which was attacked by police resulting in many casualties. Another demonstration was organised two weeks later in Jaffa. Mogannam gives the following account of events:

During the Jaffa demonstration the Arab ladies, as in Jerusalem, took an active part and formed themselves into a special procession. A special delegation from Jerusalem proceeded to Jaffa to join the demonstration at the instance of the Arab Women's Executive at Jerusalem. Here again the ladies were made the subject of a baton charge and firing by the police (1937:228).

Similar demonstrations took place in several other towns and cities, and the Women's Executive Committee sent a

delegation to the High Commissioner to protest at their violent repression.

In 1934 the Arab Executive Committee fell into abeyance. A number of new political parties were established and the family rivalry between the Husseinis, Nashashibis, Abdel Hadis and Khalidis resurfaced in a new form. However, the work of the Women's Executive and Societies appears to have continued relatively unaffected by these divisions. This was probably due to the charitable/social work focus of much of the day-to-day work of the societies which provided a broader framework for cooperation than the personal political rivalries of their male counterparts. Yet, as Peteet states:

Women's social work did not operate in a political vacuum. In itself, social work was a form of political activity, a response to assaults on the community and an attempt to develop human resources and potential for the protracted process of achieving national independence (Peteet, 1991:56).

The Arab Revolt.

The new political parties agreed to coordinate their representations to the government and in April 1936 the Arab Higher Committee was formed and took on a coordinating role in the general strike which had been called by groups in Jaffa and Nablus (Lesch, 1973:34). The general strike, which lasted for six months, marked the beginning of the Arab Revolt which was not finally crushed until 1939⁵.

At the outbreak of the Revolt, members of the Women's Congress again called for a boycott of Jewish goods and for support of the General Strike. In addition, the

Women's Societies provided first aid to fighters and collected and distributed relief to needy families.

The Arab Revolt also witnessed a militancy among rural women who:

took part in the efforts to resist the British and Zionist settlers by going out on missions with their men and helping with supplies of ammunition and provisions (Haddad,1980:160).

There are some instances of women joining the fighting, and in 1936 Fatima Ghazal was killed in fighting near Lydda (Bendt and Downing,1982:42). However, as Peteet makes clear, the bourgeois women of the Congress and Societies were in no doubt about their own leading role:

As one woman told me, "The peasant women used to *help us* by smuggling weapons and carrying food to the mountains for the fighters." This was a lucid expression of the elite's sense of hegemony over the political process and perception of the struggle for independence as largely their own, since they assumed they would lead the country if independence were achieved (Peteet,1991:56).

The British repression of the Revolt effectively destroyed existing political organisation through policies of deportation and internment. The economic effects of the Revolt only added to the sense of devastation. During the Second World War political activity was banned, and the disarray among Palestinian leaders left them incapable of effective underground organisation. This contrasted sharply with the situation among the Zionists who were given considerable freedom of manoeuvre and were able to arm themselves and expand their organisational networks.

The Arab Women's Societies.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Women's Societies stepped up their activities. Huda Sharaawi, the Egyptian feminist, was appointed their spokeswoman and the head-quarters in Jerusalem coordinated an international campaign in support of the Arab cause. The volunteer militia of the Arab Higher Committee 'also included women who were as enthusiastic as the men' (Tannous, 1988:461). In 1947 women were active in providing food and ammunition to fighters and helped in the digging of trenches (Haddad, 1980:186).

The war of 1948 resulted in massive social and economic dislocation with the loss of some 70 per cent of the land area of Palestine and the creation of 700,000 refugees. For women living in the West Bank and Gaza, where most of the dispossessed sought refuge, the immediate task was to assist in the organisation of relief efforts. The charitable organisations and Women's Societies which had emerged during the mandate period provided the basis of these efforts.

The Arab Women's Societies played an important part in these activities. For example, the Society in Bethlehem provided first aid and ran a 70-bed hospital for the wounded during the war. Mrs Hajjar, one of the founder-members of the society recalled their activities:

As the war continued, the refugees came. It was terrible. They had left everything behind, and that winter there was a lot of rain and snow and they were sleeping almost under water. It was when we saw the cruelty and injustice done to them that we Bethlehem people really became nationalists. We tried to do what we could for the refugees who camped around Bethlehem. We set up a kitchen and for six or seven months were cooking five hundred meals

every day. We had sixty members by then, but it was still hard work (Warnock, 1990:160).

The Arab Women's Society of Nablus undertook similar work, and went on to establish maternity and children's hospitals, literacy classes, training courses in shorthand and typing, book-keeping and languages. In 1952 they started a girls' orphanage and in 1969 a training centre for the blind.

Mrs Abdel Hadi, a leading organiser of the Nablus Society, was one of only twelve women delegates to the first Palestine National Council (PNC) meeting in Jerusalem in 1964. In 1965 she was a founder-member of the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW) and was elected president of its executive committee (Antonius, 1980:33-34). She was deported from Nablus by the Israelis in 1969.

Other examples of the way in which the activities of women during the mandate period were expanded and adapted to meet the new circumstances, should include the establishment of Dar al-Tifl al-Arabi (House of the Arab Child) in 1948. It was founded by Hind al-Husseini who had worked in the head-quarters of the Arab Women's Society in Jerusalem in 1947. Dar al-Tifl was originally intended to care for the orphans of the Deir Yassin massacre *. From its beginnings as an orphanage it has expanded to include a school, teacher training college and museum of national culture.

In the aftermath of the Arab defeat in Palestine, the women's societies concentrated their efforts upon charitable work. The political aspect of their activities during the 1930s and 1940s, which had been largely

dependent upon their association with the Arab Congress and its successor organisations, was almost completely eradicated. In the political vacuum which existed in the aftermath of the defeat of 1948, women's organisations concentrated their energies upon trying to meet some of the overwhelming social and economic needs of the displaced Palestinians.

The General Union of Palestinian Women.

The 1960s witnessed a change in the international political order; the process of decolonisation was clearly irreversible, and indeed by the mid-1960s the majority of states in Africa and Asia had gained their independence. Yet, in the case of the Palestinians, the State of Israel looked ever more permanent, and there was no sign of any willingness to reach a political settlement, or to allow the refugees to return to their homes. On the contrary, Palestinian property within Israel had been confiscated, and the Law of Return passed in 1950⁷ reinforced the fact that a Zionist Jewish state was obliterating Palestinian existence in the area. The failure of the Arab states to counter these facts was evident, and helped to pave the way for the emergence of new forms of national struggle.

The mid-1960s marked a watershed in Palestinian national politics. In May 1964 the Palestinian Liberation Organisation was established and, on New Year's Day 1965, Fateh launched its military operations, and the idea of an independent, autonomous Palestinian liberation movement began to take hold among the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In the same year the General

Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW) was formed. Mrs Abdel Hadi explains:

In August 1965, at the suggestion of the PLO, we held a conference and invited representatives from all over Palestine to create an organisation to represent and mobilise Palestinian women, and to work for the liberation of Palestine. This was the beginning of the GUPW (Antonius, 1980:34).

The thinking behind the establishment of the GUPW bore close comparison with that of the Arab Women's Congress more than thirty years before. The relationship between the women's organisation and the wider national movement was similar. The women who were prominent in its activities were, in many cases, the same women who had run the Women's Congress.

Despite the political transformation of Palestine, the new Palestinian nationalist organisation had recourse to the same women that had been dominant in the anti-colonial struggle of the 1930s and 1940s. Thus, initially the new political realities were not reflected in the emergence of a new political leadership in the GUPW: the GUPW reflected the continuity of the bourgeois nationalist struggle.

As the official women's wing of the PLO, the GUPW represented an attempt by the Palestinian national movement to direct the various Palestinian women's societies and to organise them to support a specific nationalist agenda:

Henceforth the direction, composition, and development of the women's movement were intimately linked to that of the larger national movement (Peteet, 1991:64).

There were 139 delegates and they elected a nine-member Executive Committee. The various pre-existing women's organisations in the West Bank and Gaza kept their own organisational identity but cooperated with the GUPW. This provided them with a greater degree of protection vis-a-vis the authorities - initially the Jordanian, and then the Israeli.

Women's Organisations under the Israeli Occupation.

Within two years of the founding of the GUPW the West Bank and Gaza Strip were occupied by Israel. Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories found themselves isolated from their compatriots in the rest of the Arab world. The exiled political leadership of the various Palestinian factions existed outside the Occupied Territories in circumstances that were quite different from those pertaining under military occupation.

Conversely, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza were cut-off from their political leadership. This isolation was emphasised by the diverging experiences of dispossession and occupation. These differences also became apparent among Palestinian women and their organisations.

In the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the 1967 occupation gave renewed impetus to the work of the women's charitable organisations. This was due to the additional social and economic dislocation which resulted from the occupation. Another important factor was the large numbers of Palestinians leaving the West Bank, in particular, in search of work. As Hajjar, one of the founder-members of the Arab Women's Society in Bethlehem explained:

We used to give food to the poor in the region, and there were many who needed it, but after the occupation we had a radical change of thinking. We realised that instead of giving charity, we should give work. This was because so many people were leaving and going to work outside, we thought we could encourage them to stay (Warnock, 1990:163).

In the wake of the occupation, the Bethlehem Society succeeded in unifying the efforts of the various charitable organisations in the town to set up a factory to produce silver-ware for sale in local souvenir shops. The profits were used to provide long-term loans to poor students and those wishing to start their own workshops or small businesses (Giacaman, n.d.:7).

Other charities adopted similar strategies - e.g. In'ash al-Usra (Society for Family Renewal), established in 1965 by Samira Khalil, an outspoken nationalist. From its inception as a small sewing workshop it has expanded to run a sizeable sewing and embroidery business providing an income to women out-workers. It also operates a number of other income generating projects, including a bakery, as well as running an orphanage, day-care facility, library and cultural centre, and women's vocational training programme.

It was activities such as those of In'ash al-Usra and the Arab Women's Society of Bethlehem (and others like Dar al-Tifl, and the Nablus Arab Women's Society) which created the background experience of the women who were to organise the committees which emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Although the committees espoused a much more overtly political role for themselves, and for women in Palestinian society in general, much of their practical work was of a similar nature to that of the organisations which preceeded them.

The situation which made the development of the women's committees possible was influenced by many factors other than the opportunities and limitations of working within the women's charitable organisations. Probably chief among these was the growth of mass political consciousness in the West Bank and Gaza, and the predominance of the PLO as a vehicle of expression of Palestinian nationalist aspirations.

Within this context the GUPW played an important role in gaining a position for women within the organisational framework of the PLO and for promoting their participation in the national movement - including armed struggle. By 1980 women represented the following percentage of cadres in the institutions of the PLO: steadfastness 67pc (27pc of its leadership); media 24pc; social affairs 65pc; Palestine Red Crescent 70pc (25pc of its leadership); research 45pc and planning 36pc (Kazi, 1987:37). In considering these figures Kazi suggests that:

education has become a great asset to middle-class women in becoming involved in the struggle while keeping a balance between tradition and political activism (1987:37).

At another level, in the aftermath of the 1967 occupation, women were involved in collecting weapons abandoned by the Jordanians and in military attacks upon the Israelis (Sayigh, 1985:7).

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine organised women in the occupied areas. Their initial assignments were in the resistance efforts, including political insurrection, distribution of pamphlets, smuggling of arms and providing a haven for freedom fighters. The women were later given

military training and were sent out on missions with the men (Haddad, 1980:162).

Although women's involvement in armed struggle tended to be limited to a relatively small number of 'exceptional' individuals, a mark of women's activism in the wake of the occupation can be found, for example, in the numbers of women who were detained by the Israelis. Between 1967-79 some 2,000 women were imprisoned by the Israelis (Antonius, 1980:29) and 37 were deported from the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Lesch, 1979).

Radicalisation of Women's Organisation.

The active participation of women in the PLO's military, social and political struggles began in Jordan in the late 1960s. In the wake of Black September these women moved to Lebanon with the rest of the nationalist forces, and became leaders of the women's movement within the PLO in Lebanon (Peteet, 1991:102). Women were mobilised in larger numbers in Lebanon than elsewhere because of the sustained military alert and constant upheavals and crises. At the same time:

Their participation in formal politics became an indicator of modernization, radicalism, progressiveness, and social development and a sign of the rejection of the 'backward past', which Palestinians, intellectuals and ordinary people alike, often assign saliency in facilitating Zionist control over Palestine (Peteet, 1991:103).

The involvement of women in Palestinian commando raids and hijackings, etc., in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and their organisation in the camps in Lebanon, made a considerable impact upon the younger generation of women living under military occupation in the West Bank and Gaza.

However, the very different circumstances of Palestinians in Lebanon and in the Occupied Territories inevitably necessitated the development of varied responses within the national movement. Thus, because of the nature of the occupation the military option was never a major factor in the West Bank, and ceased to be so in the Gaza Strip after 1971.

At the same time there were important economic and social forces at work (the impact of which were accelerated considerably by the occupation itself) which were to contribute to the radicalisation of women's organisation. Among these were the growth of female education, and the development of Palestinian universities, the increased entry of women into the waged labour market, and the increasingly central role of women as family providers. These were all factors in creating the circumstances in which new ideas about the organisation and mobilisation of women could be expressed, and in which the various PLO factions felt it necessary to actively promote the organisation of women in the Occupied Territories.

These issues will be dealt with subsequently, but it is important to note that the political, economic and social changes outlined here contributed to a sizable expansion in the numbers of women who became actively involved in the various organisations. Those active at the administrative level were largely drawn from the first generation of Palestinian women university graduates. Although predominantly from the urban upper-middle class, this was no longer exclusively the case. Education was considered a valuable asset by all sections of society and by the late 1970s the availability of local

universities meant that increasing numbers of women from rural, refugee and poorer families were attending.

The impact of greater access to education for a wider cross-section of women was reflected in the women's committees. Women who were not necessarily from the upper-middle class or traditional elites, began to travel to university (even if they returned home each day) and mix with women from other parts of the Occupied Territories and from different social backgrounds. These experiences were carried over into the organisation of the women's committees, and contained within them the potential to assist the committees in their efforts to establish branches among waged labourers, as well as in villages and refugee camps. As Hiltermann notes:

Although university-educated women figure prominently in the national leadership and in some of the urban committees, many blue-collar workers and village women play important roles in the movement, especially at the local level (1991:133).

The Women's Committees.

As we shall see subsequently, the women's committees which were established in the late 1970s and early 1980s differed from the existing women's charitable organisations in the Occupied Territories not so much in what they did (kindergartens, literacy, employment and health programmes) but in how they did it (placing an emphasis on grass-roots mobilisation, decentralised democratic structures and the active involvement of poor rural and refugee women). In this sense they had more in common with the organisational models found in the refugee camps of Lebanon.

Their development was assisted by the introduction of new funding sources in the West Bank and Gaza Strip during the 1980s. This provided a degree of autonomy from Jordanian and Arab largesse (although it could be said that it also helped to promote the agendas of various European and American NGOs)².

The UN Decade for Women and its conference in Nairobi in 1985 were also significant in increasing the awareness of women within the committees of the wider debates around subjects such as women and development, and feminism and nationalism, in Africa, Asia and Latin America. For the first time, Palestinian women's organisations were beginning to self-consciously locate themselves within the international feminist movement, which the UN decade did much to promote. At the same time the national movement promoted the women's committees in the international arena because, in this context, it helped them to benefit from the impression of being a progressive, modern, liberation movement.

The committees occupied a grey area in terms of their relations with the Israeli authorities which allowed them to be more overtly political in nature than the charities could ever be and, at the same time, necessitated an ambiguous, semi-clandestine approach to organisation. Their links with the four main Palestinian factions (Fateh, the Popular Front, the Democratic Front and the Communist Party) ensured that they would continue to operate in this fashion, and that the leadership and offices of the committees on occasion would be targets of the military authorities.

The first women's committee was started in Ramallah in 1978. It brought together middle-class women:

who were ideologically motivated and politically committed and those who were well-educated, nationalistic, socially aware and already fairly active in social and political life (Giacoman, n.d.:9).

This initiative was largely the concern of sympathizers of the leftist factions of the PLO and the communists, who had already signalled their appreciation of the importance of grass-roots organisation in their activities among labour unions. They found it easier to organise within the Occupied Territories than other Palestinian groups because of their long history in the region, their non-advocacy of armed struggle, their support for a two-state solution, and the fact that they were not in the PLO. They also had links with communists in Israel who provided some support (Cobban, 1990:217). Although these factors meant that the communists were viewed with a degree of antagonism by many of the more radical nationalist groups and their sympathizers, they also gave them an organisational advantage within the Occupied Territories.

Not long after its inception, the Women's Work Committee split along ideological grounds and the Working Women's Committee was established as a result. Subsequently, in 1981 the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees (UPWC) was founded, and the following year saw the establishment of the Women's Committee for Social Work. Each of these four women's committees support one of the four main Palestinian factions. They follow broadly similar forms of organisation and express similar goals, although the Women's Committee for Social Work is less activist based

and has more similarities with some of the older women's charities in its forms of organisation and working.

The pattern of organisation was set in the late 1970s and uses the principle of small local committees forming the social and political base of the organisation. To take the Palestinian Federation of Women's Action Committees (PFWAC) (formerly the Women's Work Committee) as an example: their membership is organised into basic committees according to place of residence. The basic committees have between 15-30 members each. They meet on a monthly basis to discuss the work of the committee and to attempt to expand local membership. Once the basic committee reaches 30 members it is split and a new committee is formed. The basic committee elects a secretariat to supervise local work and to send a representative to the district committee, which takes care of work in the area. It plans future priorities for the PFWAC in the area. There is also an executive office which is elected during the annual conference. Together with the secretariats of the district committees it makes up the higher committee. The executive office has 15-19 members, meets once a fortnight and is responsible for the work of the work of the Federation in the Occupied Territories (PFWAC, 1988).

The organisation of the women's committees along factional lines reinforced the link between women's organisations and the national movement. As had been the case with the anti-colonial struggle during the British Mandate, and again with the establishment of the PLO and the GUPW, the women's committees reflected the politics of the national movement. Thus, their inception did not mark the introduction of a women's agenda into the

national movement, but represented the recognition by various political factions of the need to extend political organisation to women in the Occupied Territories. This was considered desirable at this particular time because of a convergence of a number of factors - already discussed above - which meant that women were playing an increasingly prominent role in Palestinian society in the absence of adult male members of the community.

When considering the organisation of the women's committees it is important to keep in mind the degree of factionalism and competition for members and resources which resulted in duplication of activities, concentration in certain geographic areas and inflated estimates of membership.

The existence of four women's committees, each linked with a faction of the Palestinian resistance, inevitably meant that an important factor (normally the dominant one) for joining one committee - as opposed to another - was political. Women might be recruited as students, or through one of the unions, or perhaps most commonly, as a result of a family connection. If a relative were involved in the activities of one of the factions, it would be natural for his wife, sister, or daughter to join the women's committee of that particular faction. In this way the structures (and strictures) of patriarchy could be extended into the recruitment of the women's committees.

The tendency for recruitment to popular organisations to follow factional allegiances has often been defended in

terms of its supposed benefits. For example, Hiltermann quotes a UPWC activist as saying:

it is a good thing to have more than one committee: it creates honest competition and offers women who are trying to leave the prison of their home more options.

He continues by suggesting that:

Factionalism and competition among the four committees almost certainly spurred recruitment, as it did in the labor movement (Hiltermann, 1991:135).

However, Hiltermann does go on to caution against the extension of factional interests into policy making which could result in the subservience of women's needs to petty political squabbles.

In 1990 the PFWAC (probably the largest of the women's committees in terms of active members) claimed a membership of 10,000. Warnock (1990:167) estimated the total membership of all the committees in the mid-1980s to be about 10,000 with the PFWAC contributing approximately 60 per cent of the total. If a similar proportionate membership were maintained in the late-1980s, the combined membership of the women's committees would be around 17,000.

However it is doubtful that even if this figure were an accurate estimate, it would reflect the numbers of actively committed participants: all the committees reported rapid growth during the Intifada (e.g. the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees claimed a 70 per cent increase in membership (UPWC n.d.)) and yet Intifada levels of activism have proved extremely difficult to maintain. This is probably largely due to the gradual reassertion of old priorities concerning the routine of

women's lives, which naturally tended to militate against consistently high levels of political activism.

The often repeated assertion that factionalism spurred recruitment does not seem to contain much substance. Hiltermann says it is impossible to verify membership figures, and even if the inflated figures given by the committees were to be accepted at face value, it is not clear that these are particularly impressive in the light of their claims to be mass-based organisations which are operating amongst a highly politicised population.

Instead, it could be argued that mobilisation on the basis of factionalism artificially delimits the potential constituency. Hiltermann's own research actually supports this:

When the city-based committees grew and started to turn their energies toward the villages and camps, they approached women, usually of similar political persuasion, who had already been active on a local level, either as individuals or as members of existing organisations, including youth clubs (Hiltermann, 1991:136).

Hiltermann goes on to suggest that the committees concentrated their recruitment efforts upon different sectors of society. The UPWC consisted mainly of 'students, professionals and office workers, betraying the committee's petite bourgeois roots' (144). The FPWAC concentrated on housewives, the UPWWC tended to be urban-based, young working women. These differences were essentially a reflection of the socio-political strengths of the various factions.

In other words, rather than reaching out in an attempt to mobilise the majority of women, who would not have had

links with any political faction, it could be argued that the women's committees became organisers of women who already had some contact with one or other of the political factions. There is little evidence to suggest that such a pattern of organising enhanced the ability of the women's committees to effectively mobilise a mass constituency in the villages and refugee camps of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Conclusion.

A consistent element in the involvement of Palestinian women's organisations in the anti-colonial struggle in Palestine has been the dichotomy between the national and social struggles. From the outset bourgeois women were mobilised into organisations whose primary goal was national liberation. Thus, the early women's congress had an anti-Zionist, nationalist political programme as its main platform, and offered its whole-hearted (and uncritical) support to the Arab Congress and Higher Executive.

However, as Mogannam recognised, the social-legal struggles of women elsewhere in the Middle East for equality before the law, an end to polygamy, and child marriage, etc., were not joined by women in Palestine who felt constrained from appealing to a colonial power for their social rights, and who also recognised the potential backlash from religious and conservative elements that this might cause (Mogannam, 1937:53).

As a result, the early women's organisations supported the political agenda of national self-determination, and at the level of the social struggle confined themselves

to charitable activities. The underlying assumption of this was that their rights as women (in as far as they were articulated separately) would only be attained after national liberation.

Fifty years later this viewpoint was still a dominant one in the women's committees in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The primacy of the national struggle remained virtually unquestioned. In 1985, the Palestinian delegation to the Nairobi conference to mark the UN Decade for Women stated:

In view of the racist policies of the Jewish State, and in the absence of a Palestinian National State, the role of the Palestinian woman has proved decisive in development as the basis for steadfastness in the face of liquidation of the cause of our people, and for continuing the struggle to end occupation and to exercise the right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State under the leadership of the PLO, the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people (Hiltermann, 1991:164).

Thus, the potential conflict between the national and social struggles was resolved (or avoided) by tailoring demands for social change so that they could be accommodated within the momentum of the national movement.

Gluck suggests that the women's committees are addressing some of the issues of women's status within patriarchal society and that the practical evidence of this is seen in their work, education and health programmes. She goes on to say:

However, the leaders of the grassroots women's committees take great care not to challenge nationalist fervor by openly confronting traditional

values and institutions - many of which carry the seeds of women's oppression (Gluck,1990:5).

The Intifada, which began in December 1987, marked a new upsurge in women's participation in the national movement. Not only were they visible in large numbers in street protests, demonstrations and sit-ins, they were also active in the neighbourhood popular committees which were established in the first year of the uprising. These changes will be considered in more detail subsequently, but it should be noted that a further development of the women's movement in the Occupied Territories was the establishment of a number of women's research centres which specifically devoted their efforts to examining social questions concerning women. Thus, for example, in 1990-91 there was a conference on the question of veiling, and a workshop on domestic violence. Similarly, discussions on the redrafting of family and personal law were initiated.

These new departures suggest that the views, always expressed by certain individuals within the Palestinian women's organisations, that the social struggle should be more than a tool of the national struggle, are gaining ground. In 1986, Amal Wahdan, a FPWAC activist stated that:

The struggle for our rights as workers and as women should start now or we'll end up with another bourgeois state and another kind of regime that will oppress women and the working class. It all has to go side by side (Hiltermann,1991:165).

It may be that in the wake of the upsurge in women's activism during the Intifada, and of support for the Islamicist movement in the Occupied Territories, the

women's organisations feel that the time has come to define a clear position on key social issues.

Nevertheless, up to now, it would appear that in many ways the challenges facing the Palestinian women's movement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have changed remarkably little since the first women's congress. The articulation of national identity has tended to emphasise 'traditional' peasant society as being the ideal. This does not reflect the social changes which have brought women into the educational process, and the waged labour market and, in increasingly large numbers, taken them out of the confines of the home.

The official rhetoric of Palestinian nationalism does not offer a critique of patriarchal society, and because of the structural attachment of women's organisations to the national movement, they have refrained too from articulating a critique of women's oppression. In this sense, at the organisational level, the social and national struggles have continued to be viewed as separate entities, which at best form part of a natural continuum.

However, the women's organisations have refrained from formally articulating a view which would place social transformation at the heart of national liberation. Yet the idea that women will attain their rights after national liberation by virtue of their support for, and involvement in, the national struggle is one that has been widely discredited by the experience of women in anti-colonial struggles throughout Africa and Asia.

In the chapters that follow we shall look at the role of women's organisations in promoting social change in pursuit of a nationalist agenda, and consider the significance (if any) of the lack of an articulated feminist agenda. This will be considered in relation to four important aspects of women's lives - education, employment, health and the family.

NOTES

¹ Zleecha Shihaabi went on to run the head-quarters of the Arab Women's Society in Jerusalem in 1947, and was deported by the Israelis in 1968.

² At this time women in Egypt were also organising against British rule. Many of the initiatives undertaken by Palestinian women in the 1920s and 1930s mirror those of their Egyptian counterparts, although the Egyptian women appear to have been better organised at an earlier date. See Shaarawi, 1986 for more information on the early Egyptian women's movement.

³ The Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur, comes at the end of Rosh Ha-Shanah (the Jewish New Year). It is 'a time of holiness celebrating the creation of the world and the renewal of Jews through an intensification of prayer, repentance and good deeds' (Crim, 1989:390).

⁴ Mogannam (1937:76) lists the elected members of the committee as - 'President, Madame Dr Khalidi; Treasurer, Miss Shahinda Duzdar, Members: Mesdames Jamal Hussein, Mousa Alami, Ouni Abd El Hadi, Shukry Deeb, Boulos Shihadeh, Subhi El Khadra; Misses Zahia Nashashibi, Fatma Hussein, Khadijeh Hussein, Zleigha Shihabi'. Mogannam, herself, was the general secretary.

⁵ The general strike was called in support of Arab demands for elections, a legislative assembly, an end to Jewish immigration and to the eviction of Arab peasants from their land. For details see Hirst(1984); Smith(1984) for details about the class politics of the revolt; and Stein(1990) for a comparison between the revolt and the Intifada.

⁶ The massacre of Deir Yassin took place in April 1948. Carried out by units of Irgun and the Stern Gang, some 254 Palestinian men, women and children were slaughtered (Wright, 1989).

⁷ The Law of Return gave any Jew - no matter where they or their parents were born - the right to settle in Israel, and to take Israeli citizenship.

⁸ NGOs like Oxfam, Save the Children, and Noraid began to fund projects run by the various committees. The increased interaction between the international and Palestinian NGOs did much to shape plans for development of community-based projects.

CHAPTER 3

Women, Education and Employment in the West Bank and Gaza.

The following chapter will look at the activities of the women's committees in the fields of education and employment. The nature of their involvement in the non-formal educational sector, and in women's employment programmes, will be considered in the light of socio-economic changes in the West Bank and Gaza Strip which have affected women's access to education and employment. Finally, we will consider how far the women's committees have been able to set their own agendas in the areas of education and employment, and to what extent this has affected the nature of their activities.

In order to do this the chapter begins with a brief historical overview of the development of education in the region and of women's access to it, and changes in women's employment patterns.

Women's Education and Employment Before 1948.

The development of modern secular education in Palestine began in the mid-nineteenth century with the Tanzimat reforms of the Ottoman government. However, although the 1869 Education Act marked an expansion in education provision, the Ottoman government insisted on the use of the Turkish language in all its schools. This was deeply resented by the Arabs, and one result was the growth of Arabic-medium private schools (Mogannam, 1937:251).

The impetus for the establishment of modern schools came with increased contact with the West. The mercantile and upper-middle class professionals of the major towns recognised the potential importance of a western-style education.

Initially, various Christian missions were influential in this development: the Jesuits and Franciscans played an important part, as did the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and the Quakers. The CMS started its educational projects in 1870 and ran a number of schools in the larger towns. In 1873 it opened a school for girls in Jerusalem - 'the first of its kind' (Mogannam, 1937:250). The Quakers also opened a girls' school in Ramallah at the end of the nineteenth century which was followed, a number of years later, by the establishment of a boys' school. These schools were open to all regardless of religious affiliation.

Such institutions were important in the development of an Arab intelligentsia in Palestine. The Christian community, being largely urban-based, and involved in trade and commerce, was in a position to exploit the growth of educational opportunities. This was an important factor in their relative prominence in urban upper-middle class society. At the same time, a number of Arabic papers and journals were started which,

played an extremely active role in organising the struggle against Zionism as well as in developing modern ideas of Arab nationalism (Smith, 1984:29).

Muslim private schools following a secular curriculum also sprung up towards the latter part of the nineteenth century. By 1914 there were 379 private Muslim schools

and 95 state-run schools as well as the schools provided by Christian organisations (Graham-Brown, 1984a:16).

This period witnessed the beginnings of formal education for girls (as noted above). In 1914 there were 1,480 girls in primary school. In addition, 131 were registered at private Muslim schools (Haddad, 1980:153). These initial developments in girls' education came in the wake of the emergence of a class of Arabs who thought that Arab regeneration would come through the assimilation of western ideas, as opposed to the retrenchment of traditional values. In this context education for girls was an important symbol of progress and modernisation.

In 1920 the mandate government agreed to maintain voluntary schools built by local communities. As a result, in 'less than three years two hundred village schools were established' (Mogannam, 1937:252).

Yet twenty years later, government sector provision was still so inadequate that more than 40 per cent of applicants to government schools were rejected due to lack of space. This was in sharp contrast to the situation in Jewish schools as the Zionists had been given a free hand to develop a semi-autonomous system of education. This, in itself, would have been a spur to the demand for education within the Arab sector.

The failure of the government sector to keep pace with demand for schools is illustrated by the fact that in 1944, out of a total non-Jewish school-age population of 300,000, only 97,400 were receiving an education (32.5 per cent). By comparison, the number of Jewish school

children was 84,600 out of a possible total of 87,000 (i.e.97 per cent) (Graham-Brown, 1984:18).

One result of the inadequate level of state provision of education was the rapid expansion of private schools so that:

In 1931, 70.5 per cent of the student population attended British, French, German, Italian, American or Swedish schools (Haddad,1980:153).

By 1946 approximately one-third of urban, and one-fifth of rural children attended government schools (Haddad,1980:153)¹. However, even these figures hide the paucity of government investment in Arab education (which Haddad puts at only five per cent of the budget):

What caught my attention, when I was appointed inspector of education for the district of Samira in 1945 [writes Ibrahim Sunandar], was that the number of government buildings for schools had remained the same, from 1918 to 1945, as it was at the time of Ottoman rule. All expansion in the educational field was being carried out in rented buildings that had been built as houses not schools. The faults of these buildings were that they had not sufficient room, or playground space, air or light. (Tuqan,1990:194n.18).

The provision of education for girls was even more circumscribed. Graham-Brown suggests that girls accounted for approximately 20 per cent of elementary school pupils during the mandate period. In an attempt to overcome the shortage of government schools, a number of private girls' schools were established in the 1920s (Mogannam,1937:254).

Unlike the mission schools which were established in the latter part of the nineteenth, and the early twentieth, century, the majority of these schools were started by



local Arab residents. For example, in 1925 Ratiba Shuqair started a girls' school in Bir Zeit, an affluent, largely Christian village near Ramallah. Known as the National High School for Girls, it was transferred to Bethlehem in the early-1930s, and replaced in Bir Zeit by a new school run by Nabiha Nasser (a former teacher at the High School). Both schools catered for the daughters of the burgeoning professional classes.

One thing is certain in these schools: they teach self-independence [sic] and imbue their students with a true national spirit. Many of their graduates have already taken their places with success in public and private life (Mogannam, 1937:255).

This limited increase in female education during the mandate period was not reflected in a corresponding expansion of employment opportunities for educated women.

In urban areas, female employment depended on class - wealthier families tended to practice seclusion of women in one form or another and it was unusual to find women from this sector of society working outside the home. If they did it would normally be in a charitable capacity (see Chapter 2). For the less wealthy, other employment opportunities were found in teaching and nursing.

For the most part, in rural Palestine, women's labour - like that of men - was largely bounded by the demands of the household farm. Gender divisions of labour within the household did exist but, as Moors explains, these were not always clear cut. Women took responsibility for domestic work, childcare and food processing. In agricultural work men's labour input was considerably greater than women's in production of winter crops, but

summer crops were more labour intensive and so women's input was greater (Moors,1990:199).

In animal husbandry, women's work was essential. While men herded the flocks, it was mainly women who milked the goats and cows; the processing of milk was exclusively women's work. Buying and selling smaller quantities of agricultural products in Nablus was also done by women, but men were responsible for larger amounts (Moors,1990:199).

Women were also involved in house building and plastering, and made storage jars, mattresses and clothes (Warnock,1990:99). In addition, some among the landless rural poor might work as hired labourers during harvest and engage in limited handicraft production.

Developments in Women's Education and Employment,1948-67.

The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 had repercussions on both education and employment in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The massive influx of refugees meant that, along with the destruction of much of the Palestinian agricultural economy, there was a large pool of landless poor refugees available for waged labour (see Chapter 1).

The destitution of many of the refugees forced women to seek employment wherever it was available. This was particularly the case for widowed or divorced women who were heads of households.

Among the indigenous population of the West Bank and Gaza Strip women's employment did not change substantially from the pre-war period. However, the gradual shift towards a cash economy, which accelerated post-1948, meant that although women in rural society may have

continued to do much the same sort of work, the value of their labour diminished in relation to the external economy, as subsistence agriculture was increasingly replaced in importance by (migrant) wage labour (Moors, 1990:204)².

The impact of exile and dispossession on the value placed upon education by the Palestinian population also needs to be considered. The importance placed upon gaining a 'modern' education can be traced back to the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the impact of the West upon the region. The establishment of the State of Israel, with all that it entailed for Palestinians, only served to accelerate and expand a trend (already evident in the upper-middle class) so that it embraced the majority of Palestinian society.

In this context, the role of UNRWA, which set up its education department in 1950 and continues, after more than forty years, to provide services for the majority of Palestinian refugees, was crucial. Without the input of resources by UNRWA the refugee population would have been without an educational infrastructure. Its existence enabled the children of dispossessed and displaced peasant farmers and wage labourers to obtain an education.

This represented a major change from the situation before 1948 when, as we have seen, only about 20 per cent of rural children attended school. For girls schooling would have been virtually non-existent. UNRWA - and the other educational sectors - responded to a need for the widespread provision of primary and secondary education.

As we have seen, one aspect of the response to external encroachment upon Palestinian society was the demand for education. With the shattering of their homes, dispossession and exile, increasingly Palestinians had recourse to education as offering some hope for the future, and of employment inside Palestine or elsewhere.

In the space of a generation they had become among the best educated and most highly-skilled society in the Arab world. Education had been transformed from a desirable accoutrement of the upper-middle classes into a determining factor of economic and social survival in the context of the near annihilation of Palestinian society.

Education was also a key component of any attempt to reconstruct an idea of Palestine before 'the catastrophe'. In this sense, the lack of an explicitly nationalist content to the curricula in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, was the cause of growing discontent. The control of education, and its content, was all the more important because of the extremely young age profile of the Palestinians.

The Impact of the Occupation on Education.

After the Israeli occupation, education became a focus of attention almost immediately. The national confrontation implicit in this quickly became explicit in the case of schools in East Jerusalem. The annexation of East Jerusalem brought with it an attempt to impose the Israeli curriculum in government schools. As a result, a large number of pupils chose to attend private schools instead as they continued to follow the Jordanian curriculum.

The battle for the minds of young Palestinians was evident too in the censorship of books and other learning materials, which was a regular feature of schooling. This caused particular problems in relation to subjects such as history, geography and literature, where any mention of Palestine, Palestinian achievements, or the Arab heritage of Israel, were heavily censored.

The issue of censorship of school books resulted in a strike by school staff and students at the beginning of the occupation. In August 1967 the military authorities banned 78 of 121 approved school textbooks. In the ensuing strike, educationalists were subjected to deportation, and arrest and detention by the Israeli authorities. Eventually a compromise was reached and several of the books were reprinted with the 'offending passages' amended (Fasheh, 1984:300).

Such policies appeared to have changed little in the course of the Israeli occupation. In the Gaza Strip in 1984-85, of the 92 books recommended for use at the elementary and preparatory levels only 35 had been approved by the Israeli Ministry of Education (Roy, 1986:98).

Education continued to be perceived, by both Israelis and Palestinians, as a key area of national struggle, and assertion of national identity.³

As well as the question of censorship, the education system in the West Bank and Gaza Strip had to deal with strict controls on the teaching staff. Teachers were forbidden to form a union, engage in political activity, express any political opinion against the occupation, or

publish any book or article without prior permission (Graham-Brown, 1984a:77). Any teacher who fell foul of the administration could be dismissed or transferred without consultation to another area and a different grade.

There were also severe financial and economic constraints which inevitably affected the standard of education. Their effects have been felt in all sectors and include difficulties such as:

reductions in teachers salaries, overcrowded classrooms, deteriorating physical structures, poor sanitary conditions, restricted expansion potential, insufficient educational resources, increasing financial burdens on individual families and limited post-secondary and teacher-training facilities (Roy, 1986:99).

In addition, the military actions of the occupation produced obstacles to adequate educational provision. Schools and colleges were often targeted for attack and reprisal actions in collective punishment of a community. A few brief examples will suffice to illustrate the nature of the problem.

Road blocks could prevent an institution from functioning while officially it remained open. For example, in May-June 1982, An-Najah University lost 22 out of 44 working days in this way (WUS-AUT, n.d.:8).

Staff and students have been subject to arbitrary arrest and detention. For example, cases of secondary school students being detained for a few days during the tawjihi⁴ exams and then released without charge were common, particularly during the 'iron fist' policies of the mid-1980s when town arrest, and administrative

detention were used against both staff and students (WUS-AUT,nd:10).

Finally, the Israeli authorities might close an institution by military order. Closure orders were normally issued for one month at a time but were renewable *ad infinitum*. Before the Intifada began in December 1987, Birzeit University had been closed by military order on 14 separate occasions(WUS-AUT,nd:18).

Actions such as these inevitably increased in frequency during periods of tension or civil disorder. At the beginning of the Intifada, schools in the West Bank were closed by military order. They were shut for some eight months of the academic year 1987-88, and the following year brought only limited improvement. These closures affected some 310,000 school pupils (WUS,1989:3). An even worse situation pertained in higher education, with many of the universities and colleges remaining shut for more than three years.

Attacks upon educational institutions - and therefore upon the whole process of education - were one of the first weapons of the occupation administration in the continued struggle for control of the young population of the Occupied Territories. With few employment opportunities, and faced with the prospect of continued military occupation, education was a major focus - both for anti-occupation organisational activity, and for affirming Palestinian cultural identity. It is in this context that the expansion of higher education needs to be viewed.

Higher Education.

The establishment of Palestinian universities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip was itself an affirmation of national cultural identity: these universities were Palestinian, and designed to serve the Palestinian population of the Occupied Territories. The fact that from the early years of their existence they placed a considerable emphasis on projects like the voluntary work programme (designed to link students to the community) and cultural displays and festivals, illustrates a desire to take on the role of national institutions.

At the same time the universities were meeting a need for access to higher education among a young population with few prospects and little opportunity to gain either education or training since the onset of the occupation had made travel more difficult.

The nature of Israel's control of the domestic economy meant that education was an easier arena in which to develop relatively autonomous institutions. The Israelis were willing to give permission for their establishment because they provided an important safety valve in relation to the aspirations and frustrations of a young population.

Politically the new universities were important as national institutions. They received considerable Joint Committee funding and were seen as important symbols of national aspirations by both Israelis and Palestinians. They also provide an illustration of the way in which the nationalist politics of the PLO, Joint Committee funding, and the conservative social structure of the West Bank co-existed.

Apart from Bethlehem University, which was funded by the Vatican, the new universities in the West Bank all received considerable funding from the Joint Committee. They also had on their boards the scions of the leading local families - the al-Masri's at an-Naja University in Nablus, the Nasser's at Bir Zeit University, the al-Jabaari's at Hebron University.

The oldest of the universities is Bir Zeit which gained recognition from the Arab Universities Association in 1976. The largest is An-Najah at Nablus, which has some 5,000 students. The other universities in the West Bank are Bethlehem, Hebron Islamic University, and Al-Quds University in Jerusalem, which is an amalgam of four small colleges in the area. In addition, the Gaza Islamic University was founded in 1978.

The universities follow the American degree model. Teaching is in a mixture of Arabic and English. Attempts have been made to introduce more vocational courses onto the curriculum - although this is still fairly limited. Bethlehem has probably made the greatest strides in this direction with courses in hotel management, nursing and teacher's training. The universities also require their students to do some community work during their academic studies. Bir Zeit was the first university to introduce this stipulation and it requires students to do 120 hours of community work before graduation. The universities do not receive any Israeli government assistance and are subject to a number of taxes from which Israeli universities are exempted.

As well as the universities, there are four vocational training colleges run by UNRWA (including the first women-only centre in the Middle East)⁵. The centres are predominantly teacher training colleges - as all UNRWA teachers are locally recruited and trained. There are also a number of technical training courses for men and courses in commerce, sewing, hairdressing and beauty therapy for women⁶. In 1987 there were about 22,000 students enrolled in all forms of post-secondary education: the vast majority of these were attending one of the universities.

In addition to the measures cited above in reference to schools, Israeli control over the universities is exercised through military order 854 which, amending a Jordanian law concerning school education, extended its jurisdiction to cover higher education. It provides for Israeli control of curriculum, staff and students. It has never been fully implemented, but in 1982 it sparked off a controversy about the employment of foreign staff at the universities who were suddenly required to sign a 'loyalty oath' when applying for a work permit. Many of the 'foreign' staff affected by this measure were in fact Palestinians who held Jordanian papers - or the passports of another country. As a result of the refusal of staff to sign, more than thirty lecturers were deported from the West Bank during the academic year 1982-3 (WUS-AUT, n.d.:7). Subsequently the oath was withdrawn, although there have been tentative moves to reintroduce it in different forms since then.

In the early part of the century education was the province of the upper middle class elite. From the

mandate period onwards educational provision was an important forum for, and expression of, political control. After 1948 the Jordanian and Egyptian governments imposed their curricula upon the schools of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Subsequently, under Israeli rule, education was an important arena for political activity. From the 1950s onwards access to education expanded dramatically. The inception of UNRWA's education programme was a major factor in this, but government and private sectors also underwent expansion.

For women this had the effect of securing representation in educational institutions roughly in proportion to their numbers in the population as a whole. This represented a major breakthrough for women of all classes, the significance of which should not be underestimated.

Strum (1992) relates a visit to a women's committee in Idna, where the members - some forty women - were mostly young (many were married with young children) and worked in agriculture. They had been educated only to elementary level as there was no preparatory school in the village, but now they had arranged for a bus to take village girls to school in the neighbouring village.

Change comes step by step, they say. It was a major step forward for their generation to be able to go to elementary school, they point out; now others are going to preparatory (Strum, 1992:241).

Education became an important tool in the struggle for both economic and cultural survival for Palestinians. This was recognised by the Israelis whose attempts at

control were largely based upon the desire to suppress the element of cultural identity and to direct the economic focus towards external goals - employment in the Gulf states, or migration to the United States or elsewhere.

Women and Higher Education.

The political and social significance of the universities as national institutions provided a framework within which a new generation of Palestinians could receive a formal higher education locally and engage in nationalist political activity. For women this was particularly important as the universities, and other higher education institutions, gave them the opportunity to equip themselves for employment outside the home. This had not been possible prior to the establishment of local universities except for a relatively small number of women who either travelled abroad for studies, or gained admission to one of the few vocational training institutes in the West Bank. At the same time it ushered in a major social change in terms of the freer social contact within the universities - both between women of different classes and regions, and between women and men. Thus for women, the expansion of higher education was of considerable significance.

With the advent of local Palestinian universities in the 1970s there was a steady increase in the number of women students. In 1981-82 women accounted for 42.5 per cent of West Bank university students, and 38 per cent of students at the Gaza Islamic University (Graham-Brown, 1984a:88).

The fact that it had become possible to live at home while studying at university had helped to make higher education more accessible to women. In contrast, the vast majority of those studying abroad were male (Graham-Brown, 1984:88).

This also suggests some of the additional problems encountered by female graduates. Faced with high levels of unemployment and underemployment, many graduates left the Occupied Territories to work in the Gulf states or the West (see Chapter 1): however, such options were not so readily acceptable for women.

Throughout the 1980s general levels of graduate unemployment in the West Bank and Gaza Strip rose because of the decline in overseas opportunities and the lack of indigenous administrative, industrial and business sectors capable of absorbing educated Palestinians. Benvenisti states that:

In 1981, 11,700 professionals were in employment, and in 1983, 12,000, about 8 per cent of the total West Bankers employed. According to estimates, only 15 per cent of post-secondary graduates find work in their professions. Employment for graduates of higher education is therefore particularly scarce. It is claimed that some 10,000 university graduates were unemployed in 1984 (Benvenisti, 1986:213).

Consequently, the increase in women's access to university education has not had a significant impact on employment patterns as opportunities remained very limited.

Women also attend vocational and teacher training colleges. One of the best known of these is UNRWA's Ramallah Women's Training Centre (RWTC), established in 1962 as the first women's vocational training college in

the Middle East. In 1991 it had 670 students, 50 per cent of which were on teachers training courses and the rest were on a variety of courses covering subjects as diverse as physiotherapy, pharmacy, hairdressing and nutrition. The RWTC is a model centre and is well funded and equipped⁷.

The RWTC illustrates both the constraints and the achievements of UNRWA's training programme. The centre offers courses which fall within the confines of what would be considered as 'acceptable' training for women. At the same time it is producing well-trained and motivated graduates from among the poorest sections of Palestinian society. Lamis Alami⁸, director of the centre, has argued forcefully that the role of the RWTC is not one of self-conscious social engineering, but of training young refugee women in employable skills. Although the centre, and others like it, may not be challenging gender constructs of 'acceptable' employment, by virtue of providing women with marketable skills it is assisting them to make a positive financial contribution to their own, and their family's welfare, the options for which might otherwise have been extremely limited.

Women's Committees and Education.

As we have noted already, the entry of women into higher education in the West Bank and Gaza Strip both signified, and introduced further, social change. In examining the women's committees and their attitude towards education, it should be noted that the burgeoning numbers of women in higher education provided the women's committees with a ready cadre upon which to draw at the time of their inception in the late 1970s.

From the outset, the numbers of women students and graduates involved in the leadership of the committees was out of all proportion to their representation in other social institutions. The universities provided an institutional framework within which women could meet and discuss national issues. The new committees flourished in this atmosphere. Local branches of the women's committees were established, often with the help of graduates who had returned to their home towns, but had remained in contact with committee activists.

The over-representation of educated women in the ranks of committee activists also helped to explain the early significance given to education campaigns. They provided an opportunity to respond to an obvious social need - for adult literacy classes for women - and at the same time relate their own skills to the needs of other women.

Despite the fact that school is compulsory for children under the age of 16, illiteracy remains a serious problem in the Occupied Territories. This is particularly the case for adult women. A Birzeit University pilot study conducted in 1985-86 estimated that illiteracy among women over the age of 13 years was 51 per cent (Baker, 1989:102). The Israeli Statistical Abstract for 1985 gives an illiteracy rate of 36.3 per cent, and 33.8 per cent for women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip respectively (here illiteracy was measured by nonattendance at school, so the actual figure was probably considerably higher). These rates were approximately three times greater than those applying to men (Baker, 1989:102).

Age was clearly an important factor in literacy; of those under the age of 24 years only a small proportion were illiterate, but in the older age groups the percentage rose dramatically (Baker, 1989:103).

Literacy classes had been set up by various charitable and religious groups, and in 1976 Birzeit University started the Literacy and Adult Education Centre which aimed, among other things, to provide a degree of coordination and support for existing efforts.

The women's committees began to take an interest in literacy projects in the early 1980s. This coincided with a rapid decline in existing literacy classes and enrolment figures⁹. An indication of the kind of difficulties being encountered can be gleaned from the Women's Work Committee newsletter for January 1984:

Literacy classes were in session at a number of WWC sites and the class at Beddo graduated to second preparatory level... Financial difficulties temporarily halted classes in Ramoun, Beit Illo and Anan, as funds were not sufficient to cover teachers' salaries (WWC, 1984, 2).

Nevertheless, despite the difficulties, the women's committees continued to hold literacy classes¹⁰. The majority of them were based in villages - for example, the UPWWC ran 12 classes before the Intifada and subsequently opened four new ones. Two of the classes were in refugee camps and the rest were held in villages.

The WCSW operated five village literacy classes with between 12-23 women in each. The PFWAC reported serious difficulties in continuing its classes in the wake of the Intifada and the Gulf War; a total of 48 classes had

shrunk to only 16, with a total of 185 students, by 1991¹¹.

As well as the financial difficulties encountered by the committees in paying for staff and materials, the closure of classes also reflected a high drop-out rate among students. The main reason given for students leaving classes was economic (PFWAC). In Khan Yunis the drop-out rate was reported to be as high as 80 per cent (UPWWC).

This would tend to suggest that women attending literacy classes, who would tend to be from the poorest sections of society, have difficulty in keeping up with classes when they may be working outside the home, or on family land, in addition to raising a large family and looking after the home. In circumstances where they are unlikely to receive much support, women may find it easier to relinquish their aspirations:

Social attitudes (especially those of the husband) towards an elderly woman devoting time to becoming literate, coupled with the belief that such endeavours are futile, have forced many women to abandon their literacy classes (Baker,1989:105).

The literacy classes used women's daily experience of the occupation as tools for learning. They also introduced the students to the particular perspective of the women's committee:

Typical reading materials include committee documents, orders and notices issued by the military authorities, and readings in Palestinian history (Hiltermann,1991:152).

In other words, the classes had a high political content - both in terms of nationalist consciousness-raising, and of induction into the particular politics of the faction.

Furthermore, the literacy classes had an additional political value in terms of establishing the presence of a committee in a village or camp, and of presenting a public face - both for the domestic Palestinian audience who wanted to know what the committees were doing, and for the international donors who were looking for credible partners for community-based projects.

Similar political considerations could also be seen in the establishment of the women's committees kindergartens. Both literacy classes and kindergartens were areas which had attracted women's charitable organisations in the past. Indeed, this was particularly the case with kindergartens as there was no pre-school provision within the existing education system. Thus demand for kindergartens could be matched with experience in the provision of pre-school education within the women's voluntary sector.

In addition, both the literacy classes and the kindergartens represented 'acceptable' women's activities, and were not offering any obvious challenge to existing social norms. Thus they offered a useful point of entry into a particular community without arousing too much hostility.

At least initially, the primary motivation for establishing kindergartens appears to have been woman-centred; it gave women an opportunity to get out of the home and participate in other activities - principally those of the committee. Thus Hiltermann records one PFWAC activist as saying:

If the committee takes care of the kid, the mother has time for the committee (Hiltermann, 1991:149).

Perhaps not surprisingly given this viewpoint, the kindergartens run by the women's committees expanded rapidly during the 1980s. For example, the Women's Work Committee (FFWAC) reported in its January 1984 newsletter that 297 children attended eight kindergartens and day-care centres (WWC,1984:1). By 1985, Hiltermann states that the WWC had 22 kindergartens with 1,000 children, and by 1991 3,500 children were attending 26 centres. Seven of these facilities were based in refugee camps and they accounted for half of all the pupils.

Similar levels of expansion were evident in the other committees. The UPWWC had twelve kindergartens in 1985 (Hiltermann,1991:149), and by 1991 it was running seventeen centres with 500 children. In 1985 the UPWC had fourteen kindergartens with 535 children, and the WCSW ran twelve. By 1991 it was claiming to operate 78 centres with a total of 3,000 children - the vast majority of whom came from West Bank villages.¹²

To place all these figures in some kind of context, Asia Habash, director of the Early Childhood Resource Centre (ECRC) in Jerusalem, estimated that, in 1990, there were about 400 kindergartens operating in the Occupied Territories. Altogether they catered for just 23 per cent of 4-6 year olds.¹³

Those kindergartens run by the women's committees formed a relatively small, but significant proportion of the total - probably about 25 per cent. Most of them provided services for women who had some connection with the committee. Their rapid expansion, together with their woman-centred approach (mentioned above) resulted in a number of problems¹⁴.

In an attempt to alleviate some of these problems, the ECRC established five model kindergartens and ran training courses and workshops on the production of materials and curriculum development. Several of the women's committees realised the shortcomings of the kindergartens, and took advantage of these facilities. They now operate standardised curricula in their kindergartens.

In considering the contribution of the women's committees to pre-school education in the Occupied Territories two points should be noted. Firstly, the initial motivation of providing childcare was to free women to participate in a variety of activities outside the home. Educational concerns about curriculum and child development emerged subsequently.

The rapid expansion of facilities suggests that the committees successfully tapped a real need of women. At the same time, little attempt seems to have been made to initiate a new approach to kindergarten education. For example, there is no evidence to suggest that the committees viewed the kindergartens as an opportunity to experiment with gender-positive forms of learning. The fact that the kindergartens were not developed as models for initiating change in attitudes towards gender roles, could be an indication of the lack of a feminist agenda, or of a gender analysis of society, within the women's committees.

Nonetheless, by the mid-1980s it does appear that, in some areas, the women's committees were realising the need to develop professional educational approaches to

the kindergartens and began to perceive them as more than useful 'baby sitting' arrangements.

Women and Employment in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Before considering the role of the women's committees in various employment initiatives, it might be helpful briefly to look at the position of women within the economy of the Occupied Territories.

In Chapter 1 some attention was paid to the economic transformation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip since 1967. The salient points could be summarised as follows. Firstly, a combination of economic isolation, lack of employment opportunities within the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and economic growth in the Gulf states (and elsewhere in the Middle East) led to a sizeable outflow of labour from the Occupied Territories. This was estimated as amounting to 165-170,000 people between 1968-1982 (Samara, 1988:105).

Secondly, at the same time, employment as day labourers in Israel was becoming the normal practice for increasingly large numbers of Palestinians - particularly young males. As a result, it was estimated that by 1984 less than half of the total West Bank workforce actually worked within the area (Samara, 1988:105). A similar situation pertained in the Gaza Strip.

Thirdly, these changes had resulted in a major shift in employment patterns within the Occupied Territories, away from agriculture and towards migrant labour: in the space of 12 years (from 1968-80) the proportion of the

workforce employed in agriculture fell from 45 to 26 per cent (Graham-Brown, 1983:6).

Finally, these general figures concealed within them the fact that the internal structure of the labour force was changing. Increasingly women were responsible for agricultural labour while able-bodied and educated males went to work either in Israel or elsewhere in the Middle East. As a result, it was estimated that by the mid-1980s women were responsible for 75 per cent of agricultural work in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Warnock, 1990:105).

In addition, women's labour was also crucial to the prosperity of the Israeli garment industry which made extensive use of workshops in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Women in Agriculture.

As men increasingly left the rural sector for higher paid employment elsewhere, the burden of agricultural labour tended to fall more heavily upon women. This did not necessarily mean that the gender division of labour within the rural economy had broken down; it is still unusual for women to plough.

Neither did it suggest that decision-making within the rural household had shifted from men to women; male heads of household continued to make decisions about land use and productivity. This was possible because, despite the fact that they may have been working away from home, they continued to be based there. In addition, the rapid integration of the West Bank and Gaza Strip into the Israeli economy, which took place in the early years of

the occupation, served to increase the importance of wage labour at the expense of subsistence farming.

The very changes that were reducing the status of agricultural work were also pushing the male labour force away from the rural sector towards wage labour in Israel or the Gulf states. Consequently, as women filled the gaps in the rural economy left by men, this did not automatically lead to a change in social status.

In fact, Moors suggests that if male members of the household were employed in the Gulf states (where wages were relatively high), it was less likely that women would be engaged in agricultural work; hired labour and greater technical specialisation being preferred where necessary. On the other hand, it was more likely that women would contribute their agricultural labour where men were working in Israel or the Occupied Territories so that household income was insufficient either to hire labour or do without agricultural production (Moors,1990:204). In addition,

Within agriculture, a further differentiation has taken place. As mainly male work tasks have become mechanised (and mechanised tasks become men's work) the productivity of men's work in agriculture has increased much more than women's, resulting in a devaluation of women's agricultural work. In these ways differences between men and women have been emphasised (Moors,1990:204).

These factors would tend to further undermine the potential of agricultural labour to improve women's social status.

As well as their work within the household economy, women were employed as agricultural wage labourers. This

occurred where the family had no land, or where the holding was too small to make a significant contribution to the household economy.

The majority of women agricultural wage labourers were employed on local Palestinian-owned farms (often working for a relative), although women did work in the Israeli agricultural sector. Women labourers were poorly paid and did jobs traditionally considered as women's work - sowing, weeding, and picking.

[they] have little power as workers and are among the worst-off as far as pay and conditions are concerned. Like agricultural labourers the world over, they belong to the poorest, least educated and most vulnerable section of society (Warnock, 1990:112).

Women in Industry.

It is estimated that women wage labourers in the Occupied Territories constitute about 30 per cent of the total workforce. Educated women found employment as teachers, in the medical profession, or as office workers, carers or beauticians, as discussed above. But for the majority of women options were extremely limited. Some worked in one of the small Palestinian-owned factories, and others commuted to work in Israeli factories. But most women wage labourers were employed as seamstresses in local sweatshops producing finished garments for the Israeli market.

In 1980 the Women's Work Committee conducted a survey in the Ramallah area and found that of 250 women factory workers, 60 per cent were employed in sewing and tailoring (Pesa, 1985:8). The majority of these were employed in workshops dependent on sub-contracting work

from Israeli manufacturers. The workshops tended to be small, operating in cramped, inadequate conditions - often in someone's house - and functioned on the basis of extremely low wages¹⁵. Yet, describing a 1985 interview with a woman employee of one such workshop, Pesa states:

Salima, a 29 year-old unmarried woman with a third-grade education (whose six brothers are university graduates), fought her father for three years to have a chance to work in such a sweatshop. 'I was bored at home', she says, 'and wanted to earn a little money for myself' (Pesa, 1985:8).

In the Gaza Strip women constituted the majority of those working in the sewing industry.

Factory owners said they preferred hiring women to men since they had to pay men higher wages as an incentive not to work in Israel...In the Gaza Strip many consider the pool of cheap female labour to be all that is keeping the outdated factories from going under in the face of Israeli competition (Rockwell, 1985:120).

The women workers tended to be young and most were unmarried; relatively few continued to work outside the household after marriage - but they might do piece-work at home. Otherwise, women workers tended to be either divorced or widowed. This, together with their low pay, served to emphasise further the lack of status accorded to women wage labourers.

Women's Committees and Women Workers.

Alongside their activities in the educational sphere, soon after their inception, the women's committees began to take a keen interest in women's employment. At one level this reflected the ideology of the three leftist committees which gave credence to the concept that wage labour was the road to women's emancipation. At another level it was a recognition of the socio-economic changes

which had taken place in the years since 1967, and which had led to a disproportionate increase in the numbers of women wage labourers.

The women's committees activities encompassed two broad aspects of the problems faced by Palestinian women workers. Firstly, the committees attempted to work with women wage labourers. Primarily this involved various attempts to unionise this sector of the workforce, and to give them assistance and support in their specific difficulties, both vis-a-vis their employers and within the unions.

Secondly, the women's committees initiated their own training and employment projects. These tended to build upon women's traditional skills such as embroidery, sewing and food processing.

Taken together, these two aspects of the committees' work represented an attempt to draw women into waged labour (preferably outside the home), and to organise the female workforce. Here the involvement of the women's committees in organising women workers and the nature of the employment projects they ran, will be considered.

Women's Committees and Unionisation.

The trade union movement, like the women's committees, is divided into four blocs representing the four principal factions within the nationalist movement. (Recent attempts to unify the trade unions within a single federation have yet to bear fruit.)¹⁶

As a result, within this sphere, the activities of the women's committees tended to be limited to liason with the union representing their particular faction. The close relationship between the women's committees and the trade unions was evident, for example, in the activities to mark International Women's Day in 1984; the Union of Palestinian Working Women's Committees held a celebration in the building of the Professional Unions, in Beit Hanina, and the Union of Palestinian Women's Committees met in the Electricians Union in Jerusalem (*Al-Fajr* 14.3.84)¹⁷.

Soon after their inception, the women's committees expressed their desire to work for improved conditions for women workers. The possible exception to this was the WCSW. A 1984 report on its activities stated:

Organisation of working women or union activities were not mentioned in the past year's programme other than a solidarity visit to women in Tulkarm sewing factories to distribute flowers on Women's Day (*Al-Fajr* 21.3.1984).

In contrast, the committees sympathetic to the communists and the Democratic Front were particularly active in this field.

Underlying the efforts of the women's committees in the unionisation of women workers was the idea that these women had a greater potential for being liberated, and therefore were more likely to become politically mobilized, than their counterparts who remained at home. This was due to the idea that waged labour was, in itself, a form of liberation, providing an independent income, and removing women from the confines of the house. In the course of this, it was argued, women would discover a bond of common experiences that extended

beyond family and kin. However, such an approach does not take into consideration the nature of much of women's employment in the Occupied Territories. Most women wage labourers were employed on a temporary or short-term basis, and recruitment often took place through male relatives. One consequence of this was that:

conditions in the workplace ... 'do not differ dramatically from the ones existing at home,' which also blocks any possible move toward greater independence, or even toward a sense of empowerment (Hiltermann, 1991:36).

In addition, a number of practical problems were encountered in attempts to unionise women workers. In most factories, women worked separately from men and were collected from their homes by a works bus and taken back again at the end of the day. It was difficult for unionists to establish any contact with the women workers and, as a result, the women's committees began to make efforts to organise women workers at their place of employment. This led to:

a *de facto* division of labour ... with the union serving male workers, and the women's committee serving female workers (Hiltermann, 1991:157).

This trend was reinforced by the women's reluctance to be seen mixing in the male-dominated union.

Further problems of organisation arose because most women workers were young and unmarried. Upon marriage they tended to stop working. This meant that the turn-over in the labour force was high - and thus, so was union membership. Julie Peteet noted similar trends in the recruitment of women into Palestinian organisations in Lebanon:

Marriage usually assumes primacy both of identity and loyalties over others such as employment and

national activities. Once they have undergone the marital rite of passage, formal political activity and employment drastically decline as women uphold the cultural consensus on female propriety (Peteet, 1991:133).

For women's committee activists engaged in union work, the crucial issues for campaigning were - equal pay for equal work, the right to paid maternity leave, and better child-care facilities to enable mothers to continue to work outside the home.

Despite the promotion of these issues within the trade unions, and among their own members, the lack of a unified trade union movement did not enhance the ability of the unions to recruit workers and to adequately represent their collective needs and defend their rights.

Under these circumstances, the rights of women workers, anyway regarded as a marginal group, were unlikely to be well catered for. Because of these structural weaknesses, and the subservience of the union movement to the nationalist cause, unions have had only limited success in representing workers in Palestinian companies.

In unionising and representing migrant workers in Israel, the situation was even more problematic; Palestinian unions had no jurisdiction, and therefore no negotiating platform. Members risked instant dismissal and workplace organisation was virtually impossible. For women workers in Israel these problems were further exacerbated and, as yet, no realistic way round them has been found by any of the unions or the women's committees.

The nature of the relationship between the women's committees and trade unions had an important effect on the work of the women's committees in recruiting women

workers. Firstly, the factionalised basis of the association between union and women's committee, and the extreme nature of the political divisions and competition within the trade union movement, meant that the pool of potential recruits for unionisation was artificially limited.

Furthermore, the women's committees activities in this field were secondary to the politics of the trade unions. Thus, implicitly, they were involved in a numbers game to bolster membership of various unions in competition with unions of other political factions.

In addition, the unions were essentially an arm of the nationalist movement, having suspended the social struggle at the beginning of the occupation in 1967. As a result, it could be argued that the trade union's primary purpose was the recruitment of Palestinian workers into the sphere of influence of one or other of the political factions.

In relation to Israel, their ability to represent the economic and social needs of their members was subsumed within the national struggle; and in relation to Palestinian employers, it was often abandoned altogether under the pretext of preserving national unity.

The growth of trade unions during the 1970s and 1980s was predicated upon the use of nationalist slogans and symbols and the setting aside of the class struggle. Under these circumstances, the recruitment of women into trade unions, or into parallel women-only structures, did not necessarily imply a radical change in social perceptions of women, or of their self-perception, since

there was no articulated challenge to existing social relations within Palestinian society.

The Women's Committees and Employment Projects.

The other area of activity in which the women's committees have been involved is that of training and job creation¹⁹. For the most part these schemes made use of traditional women's skills, attempting to improve the quality of production, and facilitate marketing. The organisation of the projects varied from one committee to another; for example, the PFWAC had a special sub-committee to deal with all the training and employment projects, but women on the schemes determined their own methods of working. On the other hand, the UPWWC projects selected their own management committees from among the participants.

The majority of the projects involved sewing or embroidery. In addition, there was increasing interest in making use of women's skills in food processing. This interest evolved out of a realisation that many of the existing projects tended to depend upon production of luxury items - such as embroidered dresses - which meant that marketing was limited to a small local elite and overseas sales. As an alternative to this, food production was seen as supplying a basic local need. In addition, it would assist women employed outside the home who no longer had the time to prepare food in the traditional manner every day¹⁹.

The use of food processing was developed in, for example, the 'Production is our Pride' cooperative which was set up at the start of the Intifada in two villages - Betillo

and Sair - and aimed to implement an integrated developmental approach to the establishment of the cooperatives (Kuttab,1989:9-12).²⁰

As an off-shoot of the training and employment programmes, it was hoped that women would learn new skills such as book-keeping, management, marketing and planning, and in the process of making decisions about their work, would become increasingly self-reliant.

Although this represented part of the positive achievement of the women's committees in organising these programmes, it has been the case as well that women who 'graduated' from the training projects found themselves trapped, by lack of real alternatives, into working in the Israeli garment industry or in sweatshops doing sub-contracted work for Israeli companies. Thus, the anomalous situation arose where women's committees were training employees for Israeli industry (Hiltermann,1991:150). Unless training and employment can be grounded firmly in the needs of the local economy, given the context of Israeli occupation, it is difficult to see how such a situation can be avoided.

The employment projects operated by the women's committees did not generally offer an alternative to existing gender divisions of labour. For the most part they made use of women's traditional skills in embroidery and dressmaking and the processing of food stuffs. It could be argued that, given the conservative nature of Palestinian society in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the economic constraints of the occupation, they had little alternative, and that what mattered was that women

were able to use their skills to generate an independent income.

In this context the manner of working should be regarded as significant; for if women were being organised to work on a cooperative basis outside the home, then it could be argued that traditional skills were being put to new uses.

An interview with Layla Kawasmeh, a WWC worker, illustrates this. She started work after she became responsible for her family, which included four adults and her six children. She bought a sewing and knitting machine and worked from home. Subsequently she became involved in the WWC through a neighbour:

I found in the work of the Committee an opening to the outside world away from the drudgery of my home. A few weeks later, I volunteered to work three days a week teaching sewing and machine knitting. After one year of volunteer work, the Committee asked me to become a staff member responsible for the Wadi Tuffaha Centre in Hebron with a monthly salary of 25 dinars (about \$65) (WWC,1985:7).

As the 1980s progressed, and particularly after the start of the Intifada, it was clear that the production of food stuffs - whether in farming or food processing - was seen as an important element in the drive to reduce dependency upon Israeli goods. As such the women's committees projects took on a new significance, placing women at the heart of the campaign for greater self-reliance²¹.

Women were urged to increase production of foodstuffs in the leaflets of UNLU (United National Leadership of the Uprising), and the use of these traditional skills was clearly valued at a time when prolonged curfews were

common place. As part of the national movement, the women's committees naturally supported these efforts. However, while enhancing the perception of the importance of women's production, these policies also reinforced the traditional gender divisions of labour: a point which the women's committees were in little position to counteract.

Conclusion.

Throughout the century socio-economic changes in Palestine had a particular effect upon women's access to education and employment. In the context of competing nationalisms (initially Zionist v. Arab, and then Israeli v. Palestinian), education was a key arena of political activity - both in terms of its institutions and the content of its curriculum. The impact of this was evident also in the development of the women's committees in the late 1970s. Women graduates and students were in the vanguard of the development of the committees, and played a role out of all proportion to their numbers in society as a whole. The women's committees offered a platform for educated women to engage in political activity, and in the 1980s they began to emerge as national political figures, rather than just as representatives of women²².

Although higher education helped to give upper-middle class professional women access to public and political roles within Palestinian society, for most women improvement in education did not herald substantial changes to their traditional roles or better employment prospects.

While the acquisition of education had enabled women from professional middle class and prominent families to enter the professions themselves - usually as medical workers or teachers - the majority of lower-middle class women took on the role of housewife after marriage. Women from poor rural families, or from the working class continued to be employed as agricultural labourers, factory workers, or home-based piece workers in the garment industry.

Thus, given the truncated nature of the indigenous Palestinian economy, and the distortions caused by the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, women's improved educational status was not reflected in greater access to employment, or in changes to the traditional gender division of labour.

The women's committees highlighted education and employment projects as crucial elements of their public profile. In concentrating on women's adult literacy, kindergartens, and employment projects utilising women's traditional skills, the committees were able to establish a public presence for themselves without necessarily challenging the social norms of the society within which they were operating.

Concentration upon such projects served to highlight the dominance of the national agenda within the committees. This was because the various projects that were initially established by the committees often reflected their own competition for a constituency and for a public profile. Before 1987, the significant contribution of the women's committees in relation to their educational and employment projects was the spread in women's

participation in specifically cooperative ventures. The content of their programmes was not noticeably different from that of women's charitable activity in the past. However, the durability of some of the employment projects, and the kindergartens suggests that the women's committees did succeed in meeting the needs of local women, and involving them in the development of solutions to those needs. At the same time, there is little to suggest that these solutions were informed by a wider critique of existing gender relations within Palestinian society in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The degree to which the Intifada affected the agendas of the women's committees will be considered subsequently, but prior to 1987 the evidence would tend to suggest that the real significance of the women's committees activities in the fields of education and employment was political rather than educational or economic.

NOTES

¹ In 1946 there were 795 schools with 118,335 pupils. Of these, 478 were government schools, 135 were Muslim, and 182 were Christian (Graham-Brown, 1984a:19).

² The changing status of women's work, and the expansion of waged employment for women will be considered subsequently.

³ For example, Lesch states that between 1967-1978, Israel deported 1,151 Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Out of a sample of 166 of this total, 79 were either students or teachers (Lesch, 1979:105). This suggests something of the centrality of education to the national struggle.

⁴ Tawjihi is the matriculation exam taken at the end of secondary school.

⁵ They are Qalandia Vocational Training Centre, Ramallah Teacher Training Centre for Men, Ramallah Women's Training College, and Gaza Vocational Training Centre.

⁶ As well as the UNRWA centres there are five vocational training colleges run by the government. Three of them are teacher's training colleges and the other two offer courses in agriculture. Total enrolment is estimated at 1,500 (WUS-AUT, n.d.:6).

The West Bank also has nine privately-run community colleges. They offer two-year courses in a variety of subjects, and operate on a similar basis to technical colleges. The largest of the colleges is in Hebron. Their total enrolment is approximately 4,000 students (WUS-AUT, n.d.:5).

⁷ Some students are considered to be over-trained in relation to the employment opportunities they can expect to find.

⁸ Interview at RWTC, 7 July 1990.

⁹ See Baker, 1989, for details.

¹⁰ Much of the material presented here concerning literacy classes and kindergartens run by the women's committees is derived from a questionnaire which was completed by three of the committees in the summer of 1991 (FWAC, UPWWC and WCSW). Questions covered a variety of subjects including size and type of activities and attitudes towards different matters.

¹¹ The particularly severe difficulties encountered by the PFWAC in maintaining its activities was also a result of the split in its ranks which reflected the split in the DFLP, between factions led by Yaseer Abed Raboo, and Nayef Hawatma (broadly speaking, those in favour of peace moves begun at the Madrid conference, and those against).

¹² The discrepancy between this last figure and those of the other committees suggests that there may well be a different categorisation of what constitutes a kindergarten.

¹³ This, and the information following, was obtained in an interview conducted with Asia Habash at the ECRC in Jerusalem on 7 July 1990.

¹⁴ Habash suggested that many of the kindergartens were little more than glorified 'baby sitting' and that the staff were poorly educated, untrained and had insufficient understanding of early learning methods.

¹⁵ 10 years later, in 1989, the newly formed Women's Resource Centre in East Jerusalem, undertook a survey which attempted to locate every woman wage-labourer in the West Bank. The preliminary findings suggested that half of the female work force was employed in the garment industry, in home working or in small factory units, or in Israel, and that most of them received wages below the UNLU recommended minimum wage. Wages for women were found to be roughly half those paid to men doing the same work (Strum, 1992:209-212).

¹⁶ In 1990 the various trade union federations held talks concerning establishing a unified trade union movement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Disputes arose concerning representation at executive level, and although a unified office was set up in East Jerusalem it remained largely inactive.

¹⁷ These two incidents provide examples of the way in which, in the first years of their existence, factional relations were more important than those based on gender; a women's committee was more likely to cooperate with the associated trade union than with another women's committee.

¹⁸ The information presented here on the women's committees employment projects is drawn largely from responses to a questionnaire sent to the committees in summer 1991.

¹⁹ Strum (1992) elaborates at some length in the course of her book, 'The Women Are Marching' on the significance of food preparation within the family structure.

²⁰ For further details on the 'Production is Our Pride', and other production cooperatives established by the women's committees during the Intifada, see Chapter 5.

²¹ See Chapter 5 for details.

²² This was a trend which also applied to women who were not aligned to a particular committee. The most notable example being Hanan Ashrawi, spokesperson for the Palestinian delegation to the peace talks.

CHAPTER 4

Motherhood and Dress in Palestinian Political Culture.

The previous chapters have considered some of the general socio-economic and political changes that have taken place in the West Bank and Gaza Strip since the Israeli occupation in 1967, and their effect on women's activism.

In this chapter the impact of these changes upon the perception of the position of women in society, and its reflection in the political culture of the national movement, will be considered. Two aspects of women's lives will be examined - those of motherhood and dress. These are useful illustrations of the broader picture as they have been the subject of considerable political activity, and encompass both the domestic and public spheres.

The chapter will begin with a brief outline of the salient features of the 'traditional' family system in order to see what changes have occurred in women's status within the family, and then to consider the way in which these have been reflected in the political culture of the national movement.

How far this has affected the activities, of the women's committees in dealing with issues concerning motherhood - in particular, family planning and child health - will also be considered. Finally, the politics of women's dress, and the response of the women's committees will be examined.

The 'traditional' family structure.

In recent years much has been written concerning the family and marriage in the Middle East, and the impact of 'modernity' and religion upon the 'traditional' family¹. The family in 'traditional' Palestinian society was based upon endogamous marriage and bound by the *hamouleh* (clan).

The family formed the basis for virtually all social relations. This continued to be the case even after the onset of westernisation and the increased urbanisation of society in the twentieth century. This was reflected, for example, in the fact that many of the early schools were started under the patronage of leading local notables - a pattern which continued with the establishment of the universities in the 1970s. In trade and commerce, well-known families were able to gain near monopoly powers in certain areas.

Similarly, the Arab political parties that were set up in the 1920s and 1930s were essentially extended family affairs; and even in the 1980s family and kinship were important factors in political organisation. Thus, the extended family was, and remained, the dominant form of social organisation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The ideal form of marriage was held to be that of cousin marriage. However, even in the 1920s, Granqvist noted that the incidence of cousin marriages through the father's line was relatively small (accounting for only 13.3 per cent of her study). Furthermore, in the village of Artas, where she conducted her research, only a third of marriages were contracted within the *hamouleh* (Granqvist, 1931:81). Numerous reasons accounted for this,

from gender disparities within the family and *hamouleh*, to competing economic and social interests.

Cousin marriage was highly regarded because:

[it] indicates that a family has attained a certain power and size, so that a man can marry one of his own relatives in the village, and that fact raises the prestige of cousin marriage (Granqvist, 1931:82).

In addition, marriage was an important means of strengthening the extended family and helping to cement the economic and social bonds between different families.

In conceptualising the existence of a 'traditional' family unit, the importance of class in determining the nature of the family and marriage should not be underestimated. Clearly, even within the *hamouleh* there existed different social classes. The type of marriage and family arrangements varied accordingly. For example, Granqvist observed that the need for additional female labour was often a reason for early marriage among the peasantry². On the other hand, among upper class women, marriage was more closely linked with property rights and so it tended to be more restrictive than among the peasantry, where divorce was not uncommon (Abdo-Zubi, 1987:12).

Concerning the organisation of labour within the household, Moors noted that:

the main criterion for the division of labour between the women of the household was age. Since daughters generally married young, leaving the house, and married women had a greater responsibility for domestic work, it was the daughters-in-law who did the heaviest work with the least social status (Moors, 1990:199).

Thus, the position of women within the family was subject to considerations of both age and class. In addition, geography also played an important part - the nature of the family in an urban setting was considerably different from that of its rural counterpart, and the role of women within it altered likewise.

In peasant families ideas of veiling and the seclusion of women were irrelevant:

women in the poorer classes worked on the land together with their husbands and fathers. For these women both the public domain and the private one came together as part of the production and reproduction process (Abdo-Zudi,1987:12).

In contrast, among the rural and urban middle class and elite, to greater or lesser extent, they were matters of concern.

Finally, central to the existence of the *hamouleh* was the control and possession of land, but it maintained its cohesion through a complex web of social conventions which gave considerable weight to ideas of honour and chastity:

honour of the men and the kinship is reinforced by the women following an ideal code of conduct and prescribed patterns of behaviour. This indeed revolves around the chastity of women, which in turn is informally guarded by their immediate male relatives (Ata,1986:59).

In this respect, the impact of 1948 upon the foundations of traditional Palestinian society was traumatic. For many men had taken their families into exile in order to protect the supposed honour of the female members of the family, and expected to be able to return to their homes within a few weeks. As Peteet states:

A crisis of such magnitude exposed the utter incongruity, if not indeed failure, of traditional cultural forms and key concepts such as honour in confrontation with powerful external forces and ideologies intent on establishing hegemony in Palestine. Notions of honour, which in another context might have compelled action to protect the community, in this case contributed to its demise (Peteet, 1991:186).

Under these circumstances, the national movement was instrumental in attempts to delink ideas of land and honour, and to substitute the slogan 'land before honour' for the traditional saying 'he who has no land has no honour'. In effect the aim was to transform the concept of honour into a nationalist call to reclaim the land.

The Impact of Social and Political Change on the Family.

The predominantly rural nature of society prior to 1948, and its cultural rooting in the land, meant that for the peasantry the burden of exile and dispossession was particularly severe - coupled as it was with dire poverty and destitution. For women this had the immediate practical effect of removing them from the source of their productive labour and thus narrowing their field of activity. Whereas previously peasant women would have played a full part in agricultural production, as well as performing their domestic tasks, in exile they found themselves denied access to land, cooped up in overcrowded camps.

Of the 475 villages existing in Palestine before 1948, 385 were destroyed completely (this does not take into account the removal of the bedouin tribes from their traditional lands) (Mehdi, 1973:7). This destruction

continued into the 1950s and effectively obliterated rural Palestine.

Dumped in refugee camps in the neighbouring states, the West Bank and Gaza, 700,000 Palestinians were denied their history and, therefore, their claim on the present and their rights in the future. The loss of the land, and with it an entire way of life based on agricultural production and social relations rooted in peasant society, meant that whatever fragments of that society survived, were to be preserved and reassembled in a form at least symbolically reminiscent of the past.

Under these circumstances it was not surprising if the idea of the family took on new significance. For not only did it form the basis of economic and emotional support, but it also represented one of the few tangible remnants of the old social order.

These trends were given additional emphasis by the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which seemed only to confirm the vulnerability of Palestinian society to external domination. One response to this, which was made by the national movement, was to emphasise the centrality of the family in the struggle for national self-definition and the assertion of national rights.

Within this framework, concepts of forbearance, steadfastness, and perseverance were centred upon women. Images of women in art and poetry were interwoven with those of the land, drawing upon the old ideas of land and honour to create the new synthesis - 'land before honour'. The natural result of this was a tendency to glorify the 'traditional'. This could often lead to the

acceptance of skewed forms of social relations, and the imposition of new behavioural norms in the name of upholding tradition⁹.

Central to these conflicting demands was the role of women within the family. This was emphasised in two particular respects - the mother as a provider and protector of the family home, and the image of 'the mother of the martyr' (Abdo, 1991:25-27).

Images of women protecting their homes and families from assault by Israeli soldiers are resonant with national symbolism. However, they may serve to conceal the variety of pressures that women were placed under as they took up this role. The relationship between political change, especially violent change, and personal psychological reaction is difficult to gauge because of the large number of mediating factors.

In her study of these processes among West Bank women in 1982 and 1985, Punamaki suggested that the level of stress suffered by women was greater in 1985 than in 1982. This appeared to be due to the fact that in 1982 the 'mini-uprising' in the Occupied Territories, and the level of organised resistance to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, helped to maintain a sense of hope despite the difficult objective situation.

By comparison, in 1985 the Palestinians had been crushed in Lebanon, and the 'iron fist' policy of collective punishments and harsh reprisals for resistance activity had been introduced in the Occupied Territories. This was a period of lull in terms of organised political and armed resistance. Punamaki found that:

Exposure to political hardships had a different impact on the psychological stress process in 1982 than in 1985. For instance, in 1982, the more women experienced political hardships the more they believed themselves able to control the Palestinian national fate and the more frequently they coped with stress by using socio-political activity. After the Lebanon war, exposure to political hardships was associated with a lower level of socio-political activity as a coping mode (Punamaki, 1990:179).

In 1982, personal resistance took on a wider national political significance as women who were actively involved in opposing military action found a greater sense of national identity.

A 55-year-old woman described her feelings after the detention of her son and destruction of her home as follows: 'I never thought that I could find so much strength in myself as I did when fighting against the soldiers who were terrorizing my family.' This phenomenon was not present statistically in the 1985 group (Punamaki, 1990:179).

The coincidence of domestic stress and a sense of political impotence as a source of increased mental anxiety was highlighted in a Women's Work Committee report of a health work day organised in Beitillo, near Ramallah. The meeting was held in December 1983 (during the Palestinian 'civil war' in Tripoli, Lebanon) and thirty women had gone to meet the two doctors:

Teenagers in blue jeans and older women in traditional dress listened intently as the doctor began to discuss the issue of mental stress and tension. He noted that many women suffer from mental stress because of the pressures of the household and children. They feel isolated at times..... A middle-aged woman began to speak: 'I've felt very depressed lately. I sit and listen to the news from Lebanon and I feel sad. I can't cheer myself up.' Some women nodded in agreement (WWC, 1984:2).

The comparisons between Punamaki's two sets of research also emphasise the psychological importance of images

such as 'the mother of the martyr' in providing a model of political identity and social solidarity. Abdo describes the mother of the martyr in the following terms:

She is the personification of the nation, ready for the sacrifices required for the nation's liberation (Abdo, 1991:26).

The mother of the martyr came to prominence in Lebanon; women who had lost a child in the fighting were feted by militants and gained a new status and respect within the national movement (Peteet, 1991:185). Commenting upon this development, Peteet suggests that:

The stature accorded the mother of the martyr epitomises the process by which the meanings of reproductive and domestic roles have become enmeshed in the political matrix (1991:185).

Similarly, in the Occupied Territories, the mothers of martyrs are honoured for their contribution to national liberation.

The United National Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU) in one of its communiqués issued in March 1990, referred to the role of women in the Intifada in the following manner:

We pay tribute to the struggling role of the Palestinian uprising's women's movement, to every mother who has lost a son, daughter, husband or brother, and every woman who meets with a struggling daughter or a heroic son from behind the Bastille of the Zionist enemy (Hiltermann, 1991:202).

The politicisation of motherhood in this way served several purposes: it emphasised the reproductive aspect of women's role within the family, implicitly applauding the mother of many sons, and it reinforced the ideological linkage between 'the mother' and 'the

nation'. It also served as a valuable psychological support for women who had suffered personal loss and bereavement. At the same time it conveyed a barely disguised message that the most valuable contribution that women could make to the national struggle was to have large numbers of children.

These images were consciously nurtured in PLO materials, as well as in popular culture. For example, the PLO Information Department produced a series of booklets entitled **Palestine Today**, including one on women - 'To Preserve and Persevere'. One section looked at women defending the land and concluded:

As they prune their vines or harvest olives, Palestinian women protect their family's heritage and their national land (PLO, 1990).

As Abdo points out, within national liberation movements, the idea of 'motherhood' was used interchangeably with the 'survival of cultural and national identity' (1991, 27). It was within this context of the politicisation of the cultural perception of motherhood, that attitudes towards family planning and women's reproductive rights should be viewed.

Family Planning.

In Palestinian society in the West Bank and Gaza Strip traditional concerns about the changing nature of women's role within the family and society, and women's dual role as both productive and reproductive agent, are supplemented by the often deeply felt belief that women should have many children in order to strengthen the Palestinian nation against Zionism.

This demographic argument, whether expressed in terms of the relative sizes of Palestinian and Israeli populations living in Palestine, or in terms of the production of fighters and the maintenance of Palestinian traditions, has been a powerful factor in limiting the acceptability of family planning and ensuring a continued high birth rate. This is assisted by the fact that the Israeli government makes use of the same arguments referring to 'the demographic time-bomb' and using Jewish immigration as a weapon in the equation.

Thus, the peasant culture of pre-partition Palestine has been reinforced by the political demography of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The existing tendency towards large families, which was prevalent in rural Palestine, has been elevated to the level of national duty within the popular culture of the refugee camps.

At present, the average number of children per family ranges between five and seven. Population projections for the West Bank and Gaza Strip show a growth rate of 43 per cent and 55 per cent, respectively, by the year 2002 (McDowall, 1989:21).

Despite these high birth rates, and the considerable social constraints against birth control, there is evidence of increased interest among women in the use of family planning.

The Union of Palestinian Working Women's Committees identified the main reasons for this among its own members as being the 'movement of women towards work outside the home' and the 'movement of women towards increased education' (UPWWC, 1989:4). However, because of

the political culture of the national movement, and its promotion of motherhood as a key national symbol, the women's committees have often been reluctant to seriously consider the issue.

Throughout the 1980s there was little public discussion within the women's committees of the relationship between family planning, patriarchy and political culture. In fact there appeared to be an implicit acceptance of the politicisation of motherhood as being an important aspect of the development of national identity in the resistance movement.

Some activists within the women's committees considered the matter to be too sensitive for them to deal with for fear of discrediting their wider contribution to the national movement. As a result, there was a tendency to suggest that the nature of women's status within the family, and the use of family planning were questions which would be resolved after national self-determination.

Thus, for example the UPWWC, although reporting the increased calls among its members for birth control, did not challenge the view that the establishment of a Palestinian state would create the framework for resolving such questions. Acknowledgement of

the enormous burden Palestinian women carry in doing housework, taking care of the children and, in many cases, also working outside the home (UPPWC, 1989:4)

did not bring with it the need to find solutions to these problems, but rather was seen as providing additional reasons for the need for an independent state. As a result, within the women's committees, questions of family planning tended to be viewed within the national

political context rather than as social and health issues central to the improvement of the quality of women's lives.

The Family Planning and Protection Association (FPPA) is one of the main organisations working to promote family planning in the Occupied Territories. It operates eleven clinics throughout the West Bank and provides assistance to UNRWA's mother and child health clinics in the Gaza Strip, and to clinics run by the medical relief committees.

Its central strategy aims to promote an integrated approach to mother and child health, family planning, and economic and social welfare. To this end it supports, for example, services to infertile couples, health education programmes, and income-generating schemes run by the agricultural relief committees.

In conjunction with the FPPA, the women's and health committees have promoted programmes of child spacing and family planning, as well as campaigning against early marriage. However, within the work of the women's committees health clinics the promotion of family planning has not been a central priority. An activist of the FPWAC, interviewed by Hiltermann, sets out a different set of priorities in their health work:

The committee promotes preventive health care through dental and medical checkups, and offers health education through films, lectures, and panel discussions. The committee also pays attention to public health issues such as hygiene and sanitation. It offers instruction on matters such as maternity and delivery, on epidemics, and on how to apply health principles in daily life (Hiltermann, 1991:153).

Under different circumstances the inclusion of the promotion of family planning would have sat comfortably with this description of the health activities of the committee, but (as has already been discussed) the prevailing political culture appeared to exclude it.

Child Health.

As the above discussion suggests, the health work of the women's committees tends to revolve around mother and child health and related aspects of environmental health. For the women's committees this is a natural development of their work as these would tend to form the basic health concerns of the majority of women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Another reason for women's committees to take a keen interest in child health is the need to combat the social and cultural preference for sons as opposed to daughters. This is evidenced in the gender differentiation of much of the available research on child health.

The high rate of infant mortality is clearly a central issue when looking at mother and child health. The Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) for the Occupied Territories is the highest in the region, and contains within it geographic, class and gender variables⁴.

The gender bias that appears to exist in IMR data is evident in other health indicators concerning infants. Levels of malnutrition appear to be higher among girls than boys. The Ain al-Dyuk survey found:

The overall rate of 44% protein-calorie malnutrition for all infants was higher for girls (51%) than for boys (34%). The results provided evidence that boys

received preferential care, with a longer average period before weaning than girls, and a longer average period before non-mother's milk was introduced (UPMRC & BUCHU, 1988:45).

Similarly, Giacaman's study of health in three villages in the Ramallah area found that malnutrition rates among girls were almost double those among boys, and that girls were more likely to suffer from the more serious forms of malnutrition (Giacaman, 1988:153).

Research into levels of anaemia does not appear to suggest a gender bias, but does indicate the existence of consistently high levels. In Ain al-Dyuk anaemia was evident in 59 per cent of children under the age of five, and in 64 per cent of mothers (UPMRC & BUCHU, 1988:35-36). A 1984 nutrition survey conducted by UNRWA among refugees in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Jordan found a 50 per cent rate of anaemia among children and also among pregnant and lactating women, while a survey of pregnant women in Gaza found anaemia levels of 70 per cent (Health Development Information Project, 1990:13-14).

The available research would appear to indicate a coincidence of malnourishment and anaemia with certain socio-economic factors. For example, the Ain al-Dyuk survey suggests a link with the educational level of the mother; while Hmaid's study of anaemia among pregnant refugee women in Gaza makes an association with:

young marriage age, low birth interval, malnutrition, low socio-economic status and failure to utilize UNRWA intervention programmes (HDIP, 1990:14).

Although the 'focus of preventative medical care has been on maternal and child health', Roy comments upon the fact that serious problems in child health persist:

Poverty in the Gaza Strip and lack of health education services are leading factors in childhood malnutrition. Similarly, diarrhoeal diseases among children constitute a major health problem as do parasitic infections and infections of the ear, eye, and nose (Roy,1986:111).

There is little indication that such issues are being examined within the government health sector. Although the number of West Bank mother and child health clinics in the government sector has increased since the occupation, the number of visits to those clinics appears to have declined from 1000,000 to 70,000 in 1979 (WWC,1985:5). In addition, only a small number of births take place in government clinics, and the standard of care provided is low:

In fact, the vast majority of mothers prefer to use the health facilities provided by Palestinian charitable societies or private clinics or none at all (WWC,1985:5).

UNRWA have attempted to monitor 'at risk' children through their mother and child health clinics and to introduce a programme of supplementary feeding where necessary. Yet, according to their own research, and other surveys conducted in UNRWA facilities, rates of malnutrition and anaemia remain high.

The women's and medical committees have health education programmes of varying types, which include subjects like breast feeding, nutrition and clean water. They are used in written materials, lectures and health promotion days, at women's centres and permanent and mobile health clinics. It is difficult to assess the effectiveness of these campaigns both in terms of the number of women they have reached, and in their ability to change and adapt social attitudes.

However, the research that has been done seems to indicate the need for an integrated programme of curative medicine and health education when dealing with questions of health and diet among women and children - a policy which the women's and health committees have been trying to implement despite the lack of resources.

The women's committees promoted mother and child health as a central aspect of community health. By doing so they were able to begin to address many of the health needs of women within the context of national political work. In many ways this was assisted by the popular images of women as mothers promoted in the national movement.

In effect, nationalist images, and the work of the women's and health committees in mother and child health complemented one another, so that the committees' health work was seen as contributing to the national struggle. This coincidence of interests gave the women's (and medical) committees the space to develop their mother and child health programmes.

This stood in contrast to the position of women's committees in the promotion of family planning - where the political culture of the national movement and the social needs of women appeared not to coincide. As the committees were unwilling to be seen to be challenging social custom or political culture, they were reluctant to embrace fully the question of family planning. This would seem to indicate their inability to set their own agenda, or to affect substantially the agendas of the political factions to which they were aligned.

The impact of the political culture of the nationalist movement upon the position of women in Palestinian society in the West Bank and Gaza Strip is evident in many other aspects of their lives. As has already been discussed, motherhood and related health issues provide one example of this; another is found in the question of dress.

Political Culture and Women's Dress.

Dress, particularly women's dress has been a common tool of political expression and of control by the state. In the Middle East examples abound of state influence over its subjects' public appearance. In the 1920s Ataturk banned the veil and the fez, while in the present-day Gulf states and Iran, women are required to wear the veil in public.

For Palestinians, in the absence of a state, the national movement invested women's dress with the symbolism of national solidarity. In this way ideas of a common national morality, which underly state intervention in matters of dress, were extended to form a basis for national identification.

The idea that women's dress had a symbolic political meaning is not new. Widad Kavar stated that in 1936:

The women, who would previously not be seen without a western hat, replaced it with some kind of veil or scarf. The action expressed the Palestinians' identity with their land, and their solidarity with their leaders, calling for independence (Nasir, 1980:124).

The distinctive traditional Palestinian dress has been promoted as one of the key symbols of national identity. As Kavar put it:

A village woman reads her patterns like a story. She is proud of them and the perfection of their execution upon her costume. For her, the costume is her 'passport', a bearer of her identity (Nasir, 1980:125).

In the 1970s and 1980s the nationalist movement, in its attempts to preserve the cultural heritage of Palestine, encouraged the wearing of traditional dress. In its various forms it was considered as a badge of national self-identity. The women's committees also encouraged women to wear traditional dress - in particular the committee aligned to Fatah.

As well as encouraging women to wear the traditional dress, the women's committees were actively promoting the skills required to make the dresses in the embroidery and sewing projects they ran. For the committees, as well as for the more traditional women's charities, embroidery was a mainstay of their income-generating activities, and one of the main forms of embroidery was that found on women's dresses. One result of this coincidence of political culture and employment was that the dresses became increasingly elaborate as the embroidery self-consciously echoed the finer examples of Palestinian costume. The dresses also became correspondingly more expensive.

The attention paid by the Palestinian national movement to the preservation of women's traditional dress could be seen as a response to the cultural attack of Zionism. This attack sought to co-opt some aspects of Palestinian culture as being authentically Israeli - as was the case

with certain architectural forms, and items of food and dress.

The women's committees were active in the defence of Palestinian national culture, organising bazaars and open days to promote Palestinian produce, art, dance and dress. In this way they were able to promote a nationalist agenda under the guise of cultural social activity. A similar policy was also employed by the student unions of the Palestinian universities.

In contrast to the traditional dress promoted by the national movement, neither the veil nor shari'a dress was indigenous to Palestine. They were imported forms which found their political meaning in the context of the Iranian revolution and the upsurge of Islamic activity which followed in its wake.

The idea that dress could be more than a matter of personal choice, and could also signal a political line, was already well entrenched when the Islamicists started campaigning for the wearing of the veil - first in Gaza and then in the West Bank.

The Muslim Brotherhood had made matters of dress and public deportment key issues throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

The Mujama' [Brotherhood] endowed the *hijab* with new meanings of piety and political affiliation. Women affiliated with the movement started to wear long, plain, tailored overcoats, known as *shari'a* dress, which have no real precedents in indigenous Palestinian dress. Supposed to represent a return to a more authentic Islamic tradition, it is in fact an 'invented tradition' in both form and meaning (Hammami, 1990:25).

However, they did hold an intrinsic appeal for women in the Occupied Territories. The form of dress being promoted by the Islamicists was simple, sober and cheap, making it an attractive uniform for poor camp dwellers who were hard pressed to be able to afford the traditional Palestinian dress².

This, combined with its identification with a religious community, meant that many Palestinian women were easily persuaded to adopt the new form of dress - in common with many others throughout the Islamic world.

In the Middle East in particular, it could be argued that the demise of Arab nationalism meant that ideas concerning the political significance of religious community were able to gain ground with great rapidity after the success of the Iranian revolution. The spread of Islamic dress in the West Bank and Gaza Strip should be seen in this context.

When the Intifada erupted at the end of 1987, the Brotherhood already had persuaded its growing numbers of women supporters to adopt these new forms of Islamic dress, which were assumed to denote an affinity with the values of the new Islamic awakening. In their reincarnated form, as Hamas, the Brotherhood continued to campaign around the issue, and where persuasion failed, succeeded in imposing the veil on the vast majority of women in the Gaza Strip, under the guise of solidarity with the Intifada. By the end of 1988 it was extremely difficult for women to walk around in Gaza without covering their heads.

Hammami suggests that the original significance which the Islamicists invested in the *hijab*⁶ 'were all but swept away' by the new correlation of *hijab* and national commitment (1990;26).

However, there is an obvious connection between the two: when Islam is tacitly accepted as being the basis of national culture and when a popular uprising for national self-determination is being waged against an occupying force (which partly defines itself through recourse to symbols of religious legitimacy) then a certain affinity between religious piety and national regeneration is bound to exist.

This idea was enhanced by the inability of Arab nationalism to return the Palestinians to their land. The abject failure of external forces to intervene in the Israeli-Palestinian dispute to force a resolution of the conflict served to promote the idea that a solution would be found only in a purified religious commitment which enmeshed pious living with religious community and political action.

As Hammami recounts (1990:26), a range of arguments were employed to persuade women to wear the *hijab*. They successfully manipulated religious, political and social sensibilities, drawing upon issues such as respect for martyrs, national culture, and protection of family honour.

By promoting the idea that a woman's dress might bring dishonour to her family, the Islamicists were exploiting the traditional ideas of honour centred upon women's sexual purity, which the national movement had attempted

to alter in the slogan 'land before honour'. However, although the Islamicists were at the forefront of the campaign, the nationalist groups did nothing to deter it, and in many cases gave their implicit endorsement.

In July 1989 the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU) did issue a condemnation of attacks on women who were not wearing *hijab*. Communique 43 (25 July) carried an appendix acknowledging the contribution of women to the Intifada and demanding that they be properly respected. According to Hammami it had an immediately positive effect, but, as she quotes a woman from Beach Camp as saying:

'I was angry because it was so late....Once you put the *hijab* on it's very difficult to take it off.'
(Hammami, 1990:28).

The main text of communique 43 is also of interest for what it has to say on the issue:

We denounce the irresponsible practices of some infiltrators and collaborators in the cities of Hebron, Jerusalem and Gaza, where women and girls were attacked with the aim of disrupting unity, under the guise of defending religion. We appreciate Hamas' condemnation of those acts.

By blaming 'infiltrators' and 'collaborators', and focusing upon the need for unity, it effectively removes the necessity to address the questions raised by the campaign to enforce the *hijab*. Furthermore, by referring to Hamas' condemnation of attacks on women, it absolves them of any responsibility for the results of a campaign which they had promoted. Subsequently, the campaign was reactivated and extended to include the wearing of full 'Islamic' dress.

The women's committees were initially reluctant to take a strong line against the imposition of the veil in Gaza. This was largely due to the lack of support they received from the leadership of the political factions, and of UNLU. As has already been discussed, it was not until eighteen months after the start of the Intifada that the Unified Leadership felt the need to make any comment upon the issue. Without this political backing the women's committees were afraid of being seen as upsetting national unity at a time when considerable compromises had been made to keep the Islamicist groups from openly conflicting with the programme of the Intifada.

At the same time, because of the social conservatism of the Gaza Strip, the women's committees found themselves in an embattled position in any attempt to resist wearing the veil once the practice had become widely established. Many activists rationalised that it was better to make tactical compromises on the issue, rather than risk a damaging confrontation.

The national movement's encouragement of traditional dress, and the Islamicists' promotion of the veil had obvious differences, but they also overlapped in some respects. Traditional dress was indigenous to Palestinian culture, and many women had continued to wear the costume before the PLO started to promote it. In contrast, the *hijab* was not a traditional part of local costume.

The national movement's promotion of women's traditional dress as being somehow bound up with national identity, and notions of modesty, which found their apotheoses in women's roles as wife and mother, implied that the existing social constraints upon women's dress had a

political dimension. By linking social custom and political identity in this way, the national movement (including the women's committees) unwittingly laid the groundwork for the subsequent campaign of the Islamicists to impose the veil.

The Islamicists manipulated religious sensitivities, national identity and ideas of women's modesty to promote the *hijab*. The women's committees, because of their ties with the political factions, and their own support for an idea of a politically appropriate form of women's dress, found it difficult to take a strong organisational stand against the Islamicists' campaign. Individual members of the committees fought long, and often personally costly, campaigns against forced veiling, but they received little real support from the leaderships of the women's committees, the national political factions or UNLU.

In effect, without the strong public support of the Intifada leadership and their practical backing on the ground, women activists in the Gaza Strip, who would otherwise have chosen not to wear the veil, were in no position to refuse to conform to the new cultural norm. In this way the dilemma faced by the women's committees over the question of the campaign to impose the veil served to emphasise the patriarchal nature of the national movement at a time of intense resistance activity.

Conclusion.

In considering the attitudes towards just two aspects of women's lives (dress and motherhood) in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the importance of the political culture of

the national movement is evident. Since the mid-1960s it has been instrumental in constructing a new sense of national self-identification for Palestinians largely based on history and culture.

The historical model upon which this was grounded was essentially rural peasant-based and presented an idealised vision of the *hamouleh* and the relationship between the land and society. Thus, in the ideology of the national movement, slogans such as 'Land before Honour' were able to call upon a potent sense of communal loss and shared identity.

Within this framework several specific views of women were promoted. They situated women firmly within the confines of the family, while endowing them with heroic qualities. 'The mother of the martyr' became the ideal type, and the message this conveyed was that having large families was political work; that women served the cause of national liberation by being prepared to sacrifice their children.

The popular culture of the national movement promoted images of women juxtaposed with those of the land in such a way as to reinforce traditional concepts of honour, and the close relationship between family honour and the land which existed in peasant society. Rooted in patriarchal peasant society these images have been used to buttress the political ascendancy of the national movement, and were exploited subsequently by the Islamicists.

Palestinian women's organisations have not undertaken a systematic critique of the images of women presented in the national movement. The tendency has been to accept

the politicisation of women's traditional roles within the national movement as in some way assisting the subsequent liberation of women in an independent state.

The women's committees, while promoting increased access of women to education, waged labour, and health care, and to political participation within the national movement, have been careful not to challenge the prevailing images of women. Rather, the tendency has been to demonstrate that women can effectively do two jobs, and at the same time shoulder the contradictions between being both 'modern' and 'traditional'; both 'revolutionary' and 'conservative'.

Where the work of the women's committees was able to complement the national political culture, they were able to make some progress in attempting to meet women's basic needs - for example in the case of mother and child health. On the other hand, where a potential, or actual conflict existed, the committees were unable to undertake a critical evaluation of the national movement and chart an independent course of action - as in the case of family planning and the growth of Islamic dress.

As a result of the primacy of the national movement in every aspect of Palestinian political life, and because of the close links of the women's committees to the different factions of the national movement, their room for manoeuvre on key aspects of the image of women within the national political culture was extremely limited. Far from being in a position to offer an independent critique, for the most part they constrained their activities to conform to the predominant socio-political view of what was 'acceptable'.

NOTES

¹ See for example, Agarwal (1988); al-Hibri (1982); Mernissi (1985); Minces (1982); Tillion (1983).

² The economic basis of early marriage is also evident in its resurgence during the Intifada (see Chapter 5).

³ The pressures of the Intifada have highlighted some of the difficulties in this respect. There has been a resurgence of early marriages, and in the Hebron area, there were reports of polygamous marriages having taken place - which had not been the practice in the region before. In this respect, the PLO's issuing of their provisional family passport with space allocated for four wives (Strum, 1992) gave official sanction to a social form which was not customary among Palestinians.

⁴ The Israeli Bureau of Statistics gave IMR of 70/1000 for the West Bank in 1985. Palestinian sources range from 59-100/1000 (UPMRC, 1987:8). Regional disparities are also evident - between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and within the West Bank from town to village to refugee camp. For details see, for example, UPMRC & BUCHU (1988) and Health Development Information Project (1990).

⁵ Many of the hand embroidered traditional Palestinian dresses were extremely expensive and, by comparison, the plain dress favoured by the Islamicists was easily affordable.

⁶ *Hijab* refers to the covering of the head in such a way as to completely conceal the hair by means of a cloth which is also held in place under the chin.

CHAPTER 5

The Impact of the Intifada on the Palestinian Women's Movement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Within a few weeks of the start of the Intifada in December 1987, it appeared to many observers that what was taking place in the Occupied Territories was a rebellion which would have profound impact upon Palestinian society as well as relations between occupier and occupied. The Intifada seemed to succeed in sustaining an alliance of forces which cut across class and gender divisions and brought together old and young, city, camp and country in a united uprising against the occupation¹.

In order to see how far this was the case, and what were the particular implications for the women's organisations, it is necessary to provide a brief summary of the salient events, and phases, of the Intifada as it unfolded.

The Intifada can usefully be subdivided into several phases which are marked by specific events and also by perceptible changes in mood. In this sense five broad periods can be discerned: the first year, culminating in the declaration of Independence, the PLO's renunciation of 'terrorism' and recognition of the State of Israel, and the initiation of the PLO-US dialogue (December 1987-November 1988); the period of the PLO-US dialogue (November 1988-May 1990); the period of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait (August 1990-January 1991); the period of the Gulf War and the expulsion of the Palestinians

from Kuwait (January-October 1991); and the period of the 'peace talks' (October 1991-)².

It is not insignificant that after the first year of the Uprising, these sub-divisions are marked by external events. It suggests that as the Intifada continued, external political realities of international diplomacy, regional politics and the demise of the Soviet bloc, increasingly impinged upon the course of its development.

The period after 1988 can be characterised first by an entrenchment and routinisation of Intifada activities, followed by a gradually increasing sense of despondency among Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. This grew perceptibly in 1990 and was evident in such trends as the growth of inter-factional tensions, including the increase in the killing of collaborators, and the stagnation of many of the activities of the Intifada. It was also shown in the reversion to the old power relations of occupier and occupied which had temporarily seemed to be upset .

Thus, slowly, the Israeli occupation forces regained the initiative, and the Palestinians were increasingly forced back into the position of reacting to events, rather than having the space to set their own agenda. In this sense the imposition of new identity cards on the population of the Gaza Strip in August 1989, and the struggle against this, could be seen as something of a turning point. (It was also at this time that administrative detention was extended from six months to one year.) At the same time the heavy economic and social costs of the Intifada began to be felt more severely - a trend which was to worsen

dramatically with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait the following year³.

It was clear from the outset of the Intifada that the Palestinians had succeeded in resting the initiative from the occupation forces, who were on the defensive, reacting to the actions and agendas set by others. It was this obvious sense of empowerment, along with the brutal nature of the Israeli repression, which caught the attention of the international community. This impression was reinforced at the outset when Yitzhak Rabin (then Israeli defence minister) introduced the policy of 'might, power and beatings' in an attempt to break the Intifada. As a result thousands of Palestinians were hospitalised with broken bones and other serious injuries.

Similarly, Israeli resort to measures such as mass detentions, curfews, closures of schools and colleges, house demolitions, and deportations paradoxically served to further the impression that they were not in control of events.

After the initial spate of demonstrations and general strikes, the Intifada quickly assumed an institutional form in the name of the United National Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU). UNLU included representatives from all the main political factions (only Hamas did not join). The leadership appeared to be flexible so that arrests, deportations and curfews did not significantly disrupt its operation.

The leadership set the agenda of politics, public relations, and action, and issued communiques to

publicise these schedules and campaigns. Thus, strike days, boycotts and special events were centrally organised and widely adhered to by all sections of society.

During this initial period popular and neighbourhood committees were established, as well as specialist committees to oversee the needs of the local community. These committees catered for everything from guarding the area against army action, to providing education and first aid. Women often played an important role in these committees. Their development, the kinds of activities they undertook, and women's specific contribution to their functioning reflects much of the often contradictory nature of women's involvement in the national movement.

There was a close relationship between the new popular and neighbourhood committees of the Intifada, and those already existing (medical and agricultural relief, youth, and women's committees). The medical committees remained in their previous form. Their workload was dramatically increased, and the range of their activities enlarged from work with an essentially developmental bias to incorporate emergency medical assistance.

The agricultural committees were a more recent innovation and as a result were not particularly well established when the Intifada began. They were strengthened as the concept of self-sufficiency and disengagement from the Israeli economy gained pace.

The *shabab* (youth organisations) formed the backbone of the guarding committees, and of many of the popular committees in the villages and refugee camps.

Activists from the women's committees were involved in the popular committees in the towns, and in some of the urban neighbourhood committees. However, Jad argues that women were not active in the popular committees of the villages and refugee camps, where meetings took place in a coffee shop or mosque (places where women did not readily go) (Jad,1990:135)⁴.

In addition, particularly in the smaller villages, one committee tended to serve as organiser for a number of different aspects of the popular struggle, thus giving women little opportunity to participate in decision making.

However, women were active in the Intifada in the villages and refugee camps. In fact, as Jad points out, in the villages they played an important role in areas where they did not participate in the towns - most notably in neighbourhood guarding duties (Jad,1991:135).

The committees were organised at the behest of UNLU, but to a large extent this amounted to recognising what was already happening on the ground in many areas, and extending it (Yahya,1990:96). The committees publicised, and carried out, the directives of UNLU in the local area. Leaving aside their central role in organising resistance to army actions, they played an important part in several initiatives of the Intifada: most notably, the development of alternative education, the boycott of Israeli goods and the development of the home economy.

Women played a prominent role in all these campaigns, and we shall therefore briefly consider each one and the nature of women's involvement in them.

The Campaign for Popular Education.

Popular education was defined by UNLU in the following terms:

The objective of popular education is not only to complete the school curriculum, but to wipe out ignorance among the elderly and to spread the national culture in every home and quarter without fear of the enemy.....Our slogan is: Knowledge for resistance (Com.26;27.9.88).

The idea of popular education had been taken up by the Intifada leadership in response to the Israeli closure of all schools, colleges and universities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In communique 9 UNLU called upon both teachers and students to defy the closures by organising 'the educational process on a nationalist basis', and so 'defeat the policy of keeping our people ignorant'.

From the outset women played a crucial role in the development of popular education. This was for several reasons. The majority of school teachers at all levels were women. Many women found themselves responsible for the education of their children when the schools were closed, and were already organising classes for their own, and neighbours' children during the long curfews.

In addition, from their inception the women's committees had stressed the importance of education in the social liberation of women. They were active in the establishment of kindergartens and of adult literacy programmes. Although many of the literacy classes proved to be short-lived, nevertheless, the women's committees

viewed education as a vital tool in the process of political mobilisation.

Thus, when the call to develop popular education was made at the beginning of March 1988, women activists were well placed to assist in its organisation. Indeed, many of the local education committees, which were set up to organise popular education, were run almost exclusively by women.

The committees arranged a network of popular education classes with informal groups of students meeting in houses, rented rooms, mosques, churches, and even in the open air. The classes began in mid-March and continued until the end of May 1988, when the Israelis announced the reopening of West Bank schools. Their functioning was clandestine as :

the authorities prowled through the neighbourhoods, trying to intimidate people so that they would not receive pupils in their houses (Nassar & Heacock, 1990:199).

It was clear that the Israeli authorities viewed the popular education programme as a threat to their control over the educational process in the West Bank and Gaza. Pupils were not just trying to plug the gaps in the school curriculum caused by months of enforced idleness, but were engaged in an active process of nationalist-oriented education as well⁵.

The popular education classes became an important symbol of political defiance, and growing self-confidence of the Intifada. Their practical educational value was probably much more limited given the lack of resources and facilities, and the irregular nature of the classes, but

at the height of the Intifada this was of secondary importance.

The response of the Israelis to the success of the popular education classes was to ban them. Any one found participating in popular education could be liable to a maximum of ten years imprisonment and a fine of \$5,000 (Educational Network 1.1, 1990).

This measure, together with the gradual reopening of schools, effectively ended the popular education classes. UNLU continued to call for the development of popular education, suggesting that it should complement the limited teaching which pupils were receiving in school (Com.17:22.5.88).

The Israeli authorities pursued a policy of selective closures, roadblocks around schools, and short-term closures to continue to disrupt formal education⁶. This also served to disrupt the organisation of popular education as well, since teachers and pupils often did not know whether they would be at school or not from one day to the next. This, together with the swingeing punishments for those found to be involved in popular education, effectively diminished its potential role.

Although UNLU continued to call for the organisation of popular education, this new reality was implicitly recognised when they began to appeal to the international community for assistance in the reopening of schools and colleges (Com.25:7.9.88). After the summer of 1988 the role of popular education was extremely limited.

The fact that women played a crucial role in the development of popular education was important for several reasons. Firstly, it provided an opportunity for many housewives to participate in the Intifada. Organising classes, teaching in them, attending, or providing premises, allowed women to demonstrate an active political commitment to the national struggle. The fact that the activities of the education committees were so widespread, and were largely organised by women, also increased the likelihood of participation by non-activist women.

Thus popular education provided an opportunity for large numbers of women to participate in Intifada-related activity in a manner which did not appear to be socially threatening, but rather built upon a traditional female role - the care and nurture of children. The women's committees were quick to exploit the opportunity by recruiting many of these newly mobilised women into one or other of the women's committees.

The women's committees activists had been well-placed to play an important role in the organisation of popular education because they were experienced in committee work and were already familiar with the concept of popular education. At the same time, the still predominantly male political leadership would not feel that the prominent role of women in educational activity would be likely to alienate more conservative social elements. However, despite their often dominant role in popular education, UNLU never gave public recognition to their contribution. This point will be returned to subsequently, in light of other aspects of women's involvement in the Intifada.

The campaign for self-reliance and the home economy.

From the outset, the Intifada made use of economic weapons in the struggle against the occupation. The mainstays of this were the commercial strike of merchants and shopkeepers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the general strikes of workers employed in Israel⁷.

Prolonged general strikes were called , and workers were enjoined to 'escalate' the action:

Let the Israeli wheel of production be paralyzed, injuring the Israeli economy. Deepening the Israeli economic crisis is one of the measures we use in order to regain our rights to repatriation, self-determination and an independent national state (com.3,18.1.88).

The same communique spoke of preparing plans for a tax boycott, called on merchants not to exploit people by taking advantage of food shortages, but instead to lower prices, and introduced the idea of a boycott of Israeli goods into the heart of the national struggle:

Let us begin today boycotting the Israeli goods for which an alternative is produced in our national projects and factories, specifically such products as chocolates, dairy items and cigarettes.

The following communique had added another important element to the economic struggle against the occupation. Asking for full support in six specific activities, UNLU put as the first priority:

Concentrating all energy on cultivating the land, achieving maximal self-sufficiency aimed at boycotting the enemy's goods (com.4,24.1.88).

In 1985, more than 40 per cent of Gaza's GNP, and 25 per cent of the West Bank's, was external in origin, and the majority came from those working in Israel. Similarly, in

1985, imports represented 77 per cent of the West Bank's GDP and 148 per cent of Gaza's: 90 per cent of all imports into the Occupied Territories came from Israel (Saleh,1990:47). The success of the strikes and boycott in damaging the Israeli economy was illustrated by the 50 per cent decline in Israeli exports to the Occupied Territories in the first quarter of 1988, and a 3.5 per cent decline in industrial production over the same period (Paul, 1988:15).

At the same time, the combination of general and commercial strikes, and attempts to boycott Israeli products, was also having a severe effect upon Palestinian's standard of living, which made the development of an alternative economy essential if the Intifada was to be sustained (Abed,1989:56-63).

Because it came in the context of the national struggle, the majority of the population of the West Bank and Gaza Strip were prepared to make considerable economic sacrifices in the course of the Intifada. A radical change in consumption patterns took place in the first few weeks of 1988, and became the new reality of people's lives. In this context there was no suggestion that self-reliance could recreate the same standard of living enjoyed before the Intifada, but it was designed to provide people with the bare essentials to survive a particular phase of the national struggle (Warnock, 1990:114-116).

Within this new economic reality it was women who played the pivotal role - both as providers of the family's needs, and as producers within the domestic economy. Prior to the Intifada, some 75 per cent of agricultural

work was done by women (Warnock, 1990:105). The home economy drive called for by UNLU was centred upon the cultivation of basic foodstuffs on domestic plots.

Although men who were on strike, or had been laid-off from their work in Israel, had returned to their villages and could be engaged in the home economy drive, the backbone of the movement was comprised of women, who either started, or expanded, cultivation of garden plots. They grew fruits and vegetables, and kept chickens and rabbits as well.

There were other efforts which involved the attempt to bring back into cultivation village land which had been allowed to lay fallow while it was more profitable for people to work in Israel than to cultivate the land. In all these efforts the agricultural relief committees and the women's committees played a central role.

The agricultural committees were joined by virtually the entire neighborhood. Throughout the spring and summer of 1988, these committees used every cultivatable plot, no matter how small...Brochures explaining basic gardening were also distributed throughout the neighborhoods (Nassar and Heacock, 1990:200).

The agricultural committees worked closely with the women's committees to achieve the goal of self-sufficiency in the household economy, as it was clear that it was the women who were responsible for this sector of production (Warnock, 1990:115). During a visit to the agricultural relief committee in Nablus in 1990, they explained to me at some length the crucial role that women played in the success of this programme. Women were responsible for the cultivation of small family plots, for the harvesting, storing and processing of foodstuffs,

and for ensuring that there were sufficient stocks to last prolonged curfews which were a regular feature of life throughout the period.

In the Nablus area, the success of the home economy drive was illustrated by the fact that by 1990 self-sufficiency had been achieved in sheep, rabbits, chicken and pigeons, and that production gluts had become a problem with some crops - notably tomatoes and cucumbers. Nassar and Heacock quote the following figures for the period December 1987 to April 1989:

cattle production has risen from 14,000 to 27,000 head; the reliance on locally produced eggs has risen from 60 percent to 75 percent; the import of Israeli milk has dropped from 65 percent of total consumption to 20 percent. Animal feed, of which 95 percent was imported, is 60 percent locally produced, and most importantly, the area of the West Bank under Palestinian cultivation has gone from 1 million to 1.3 million dunums....To reinforce the dramatic implications of these figures, it appears that 70 percent of the increased agricultural production has been the result of home economy programs by small producers [my emphasis] (1990,312-3).

Thus, the role of women in the home economy drive was central, and the women's committees made a vital contribution in terms of organisation, education about improved techniques of production and storage, and processing and marketing of goods. In all these they cooperated closely with the agricultural committees, which were initially comprised mainly of agricultural engineers, and other professionals, but developed an entire network of popular committees in the first months of the Intifada in order to promote agricultural production.

It was the women's committees which, in response to the growing economic hardships in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the continuing emphasis of the Intifada leadership upon strengthening the national economy, decided to establish a number of production cooperatives. The Palestinian Federation of Women's Action Committees PFWAC described their production cooperatives as 'one answer' to the pressing need for women to earn an income given the 'increasingly difficult economic situation' (PFWAC newsletter, December 1989:1). In 1989, the PFWAC was running five cooperatives which were producing biscuits, baby food, dairy products, enamel work and sewing (PFWAC newsletter, December 1989:4).

The dairy project at Khan Yunis, in the southern Gaza Strip, is a good example of the kind of working practices which these cooperatives were trying to encourage. It was established in April 1989, and served the dual needs of providing local women with a source of income, and producing a basic product for the domestic market. Under the scheme, the women obtained a loan from the European Community to buy goats, and to rent premises and equipment. They then tended the goats and used the milk to produce yoghurt for commercial sale (PFWAC newsletter, December 1989:5).

The Union of Palestinian Women's Committees (UPWC) ran production cooperatives along similar lines, like the 'Production is our Pride' project mentioned previously. The UPWC stated of its cooperatives that:

In emphasising the relation between national liberation and women's emancipation, these type of projects aim at enabling women to enter the work force and at improving the situation of women economically and socially. On the national level, cooperative projects provide the people with an

alternative product and enhance the campaign of boycotting Israeli goods (UPWC,nd:6-7).

The claims of the UPWC concerning the linkage between national and women's liberation is one which we shall return to subsequently, the point here is that it was the women's committees which were able to take advantage of the need to develop local production in such a way as to enhance the position of women within the local economy. It was their organisational ability which enabled women's production cooperatives to be established and sustained, and because of their contribution to the local economy, they were able to operate with widespread general support.

However, such cooperatives remained relatively few in number. Much more common was the domestic production of goods such as jams, pickles, fruit juices, etc., which were marketed by the women's committees either through their own offices and stalls at bazaars, or by local merchants sympathetic to one or other of the political factions. This arrangement served the purpose of providing a little additional income for the women, but did not bring them out of their homes, or introduce them to new working methods.

It is clear that women played a central role in the success of the home economy movement as it developed in the first two years of the Intifada, and that the women's committees were crucial in the translation of UNLU's directives on the economy into action. However, the question remains: did this change the perception of women, and of their contribution to the national struggle? Jad commented on the establishment of the cooperatives that:

Setting up a women's productive cooperative in the countryside does not automatically lead to changes in the gender-based division of labor, nor to an upward reevaluation by men of women's work (1990:136).

This latter point is emphasised by the fact that, although women formed the central productive force of the home economy movement, and despite the fact that the drive for greater self-sufficiency was constantly emphasised in the UNLU communiques, women were not publicly associated with these efforts. In communique 4 (24.1.88), the economic aspects of the Intifada were given primary importance (see above), yet the same communique concluded with:

A salute to the workers who paralyzed the Zionist economy which is breaking down. Blessings to the merchants who challenge the sabotage of the enemy army's crowbars.... A thousand greetings to the Palestinian mother who bears children, demonstrates and makes sit-ins for the sake of Palestine.

Similarly, in communique 11 (19.3.88), which develops in more detail the idea of home economy, self-sufficiency and the boycott of Israeli goods, the central role of women is not mentioned. Thus, although it would have been perfectly clear to the majority of the population of the West Bank and Gaza Strip that the home economy movement could not have succeeded without the involvement of women, this was never publicly acknowledged in the UNLU communiques in the way that the contributions of other sectors of society were acclaimed.

The general nature of UNLU's approach to women will be dealt with subsequently, but in this particular case it is significant for its failure to give recognition to the political content of women's productive (as opposed to reproductive) work. Under these circumstances it is

difficult to see that the connection between 'national liberation and women's emancipation', which the UPWC saw as crucial to the development of the women's productive cooperatives, had been made at the national level. Thus, Jad suggests:

It is difficult to argue that implementing home economy projects plays a progressive role in changing the status of women, unless it is associated with a change in existing values built on the gender division of labor. The present concept of implementing home economy is a qualitatively advanced one only through its connection to the intifada. It has value as a national demand, but there has been no attempt to imbue it with progressive social content (1990:137).

It could be argued that the women's committees enthusiastic support of the home economy movement, without having secured political recognition for their contribution, and for the need for a critique of gender divisions of labour within the domestic economy, actually served to reinforce women's traditional role, rather than acting as a catalyst for change.

Women's Committees in the Intifada, 1988-89.

The local committees that were set up after the Intifada began in December 1987 owed much to the institutional model of those established in the late 1970s and early 1980s. They were structurally diffuse, locally-based organisations which provided an opportunity for members of the women's committees to be involved in the planning and organisation of local Intifada activities. Notwithstanding Jad's suggestions on the limits of women's participation in refugee camps and villages (see above), there is considerable evidence to suggest that

members of women's committees were playing an active role in a variety of local committees.

The women's committees, the main engines behind the activism of women in the popular committees and other frameworks, were enormously successful during the first months of the uprising (Hiltermann, 1991:197).

Nasser and Heacock (1990:205) imply that the brutal nature of Israeli repression in the first days of the Intifada was an important factor in enabling the women's committees to play a significant role in the organisation of demonstrations and other activities. The fact that men faced a significant chance of being shot while demonstrating meant that women, children, and the elderly played an important role in street protests. This, coupled with the organisational structure of the women's committees, meant that they were able to play a prominent part in the early stages of the Intifada. In addition, the fact that the popular committees revolved around the neighbourhood, and thus the household, helped to locate organised women at the centre of Intifada activity.

One UPWC activist, interviewed in November 1992, suggested that the involvement of the women's committees in the activities of the popular committees was such that in the first year of the Intifada they had virtually ceased to exist as independent units.

Thus women made a considerable political contribution to the Intifada at the local level, and several of the UNLU initiatives could not have been sustained without them. Even if, as has been suggested (see, e.g., Jad, 1990, and Hiltermann, 1991), the work they were doing in health, education, visiting and supporting families, and home economy, was not challenging existing social norms of the

gender division of labour, they were located at the heart of the popular national movement.

This, in turn, served to enhance the perception of women in society. Women were able to leave their homes to demonstrate against the occupation. Images of women defending their homes and their families against military aggression became potent symbols of the resistance movement, and women were able to take advantage of the situation to win for themselves new freedoms. As one activist in the UPWWC commented:

society was starting to observe women differently. In the quarter where I live, women were more active than men. They took blood samples to test for blood types, gave lectures and carried on popular education (UPWWC, Sept. 1989:2).

This woman went on to explain that because of this new awareness, and through discussions with members of the committee, she left her job at In'ash al-Usrah, and joined the committee as a cooperative supervisor. After initial opposition from her father,

he became used to the idea and I invited him to see some of the activities. My friends in the Committee used to come over to our house and they would raise these issues in general discussions, which helped to change his attitude, and now he respects my work (UPWWC, Sept. 1989:2).

This suggests that at a time of heightened national mobilization and political flux there is more latitude available for women's active participation. It also illustrates the way in which the women's committees were able to organise women who had been mobilized by the Intifada.

At the height of the Intifada it had been possible for women from all walks of life to participate in street action, attend meetings and assist in implementing the programme laid down in the UNLH communiques. Such was the level of mobilization throughout the whole society that the usual social strictures that might have inhibited women's participation were overwhelmed by events.

However, once the Intifada had become more routinised, and the locus of control had shifted towards the external needs of diplomacy and international relations, much of the old social order began to reassert itself. For example, women began to find it more difficult to participate in street protests because they were either unwilling or unable to resist the reassertion of male authority within the family. Once the general level of demonstrations began to decline, it became increasingly prevalent for male heads of household to question the need for female family members to participate in political activity⁹.

Peteet, reflecting on similar experiences among Palestinian women in Lebanon draws the following conclusion:

In sum, crisis draws women into politics, but at the same time it deflects attention away from issues of concern to them. Most women respond to crises in a cyclical fashion: temporary mobilization and then rapid demobilization as the crisis subsides; for others it is the beginning of their political activism (1991:131).

At the same time, women activists continued to find themselves the subject of gossip and insinuation. Unmarried women who were active in the committees felt increasingly under pressure as they reached their

mid/late-20s. Many left their activities in order to enhance their marriageability, while others found that marriage and motherhood brought with them constraints upon their activism which could not be overcome⁹.

Once the general level of political mobilization declined, many women were unable to counter the prevailing gender relations within the household (Strum, 1992:144). In other words, the women's committees had not been able to provide the institutional framework within which challenges to gender relations could be adequately supported. This was hardly surprising given that the women's committees devoted all their efforts to building up the popular committees in the first year of the Intifada. As a result, many of their own activities - particularly those related to political and social education - were neglected.

Thus, although they had recruited large numbers to their ranks as a result of their prominent role in the Intifada, they had not provided a woman-centred approach to activism. For example, it became a common complaint among housewives active in the women's and popular committees that they were not being given enough responsibility, and that the tasks which both UNLU and the women's committees were giving them were no different from the charitable activities of the old women's associations¹⁰. Such disaffection was another contributory factor to the decline in membership of the women's committees after the first 18 months or so of the Intifada.

Finally, in considering the role of the women's committees during the first year of the Intifada, it is

useful to briefly consider the nature of the UNLU communiques, and the kind of social images they conveyed. As we have seen, women played an important role in the first year of the Intifada in public political activity, in the development and promotion of popular education and in the home economy campaign. This reality stood in marked contrast to the messages of UNLU, which never gave specific recognition to women's creative and productive contributions to the Intifada. Instead general commendations, such as this one from communique 32 (8.1.89), represented the fullest extent of UNLU recognition accorded to women's activism:

We appreciate the distinctive role of the Palestinian women in their struggle to bolster steadfastness and to encourage and protect the intifada.

The communiques did not acknowledge women's primary role in the education and home economy campaigns, despite the fact that they made frequent reference to these campaigns. This contrasted with their approach to other sectors of Palestinian society which they singled out for specific praise and commendation.

Another point of interest is the way in which men were addressed according to class or social categories, while women were lumped in with groups needing protection:

To the masses of our Palestinian people; to our merchants, workers, peasants, students, children, women and elderly, to all sectors of our heroic people who participate in the uprising.....Children, women, youth, elderly, merchants, workers, teachers and employees, we ask you to join together in daily marches...(Com.5:30.1.88).

Women were usually mentioned in relation to their domestic roles - as mothers, wives or daughters - or with

reference to generalised 'female' attributes such as steadfastness and perseverance. Their specific contribution to particular events or campaigns was never highlighted. Even the UNLU greeting on International Women's Day, 1989, was generalised:

...we congratulate the women of Palestine. We appreciate their heroic, selfless participation in the national independence struggle; we hail the women prisoners' steadfastness in the occupation jails (Com.35,25.2.89).

A consideration of the communiqués suggests that on other matters UNLU did show a willingness to address social issues within the framework of the national struggle. For example, communiqué 10 stated:

Our merchants have to deal with the local factories which should abide by serving our masses, not exploiting them, decreasing prices, not toying with workers' wages or work hours, and not dismissing workers (11.3.88).

The same communiqué also called for the lowering of prices on a wide range of essential items because of the economic hardships being faced by people. UNLU supported these injunctions with mention of 'special bodies which will follow up these matters concerning the workers'.

However, in relation to the needs of women, UNLU was noticeably silent. For example, the particular issue of veiling, and UNLU's response to this, has already been discussed at some length in Chapter 4. It could be argued that if UNLU had given more public acknowledgement of the role of women in the Intifada - if, for example, they had specified their prominent role in the education and home economy campaigns, and defended their right to demonstrate and engage in public political activity - the

Islamicists would not have found such a sizeable audience for their campaign of veiling.

In making such a suggestion the role of the women's committees in the first year of the Intifada cannot be ignored. They did not use their central role in the Intifada to push for the national movement to embrace a critique of gender relations. Indeed, at that point in the Intifada the women's committees themselves were not promoting any such critique. On the contrary, the subsuming of their activities into those of the popular committees suggested that any distinctive gender-oriented activity or analysis that might have existed had been suspended in favour of nationalist activity.

Women Activists on the Defensive.

As we have seen, the popular committees of the Intifada gave activist women an opportunity to make a central contribution to the national movement. At the same time, their involvement in the popular committees gave them the opportunity to organise newly-mobilised women into the women's committees.

The central importance of the popular committees began to recede in the second year of the Intifada. They were officially banned by the Israelis in August 1988 (Nassar and Heacock, 1990:321), and after this their nature began to change from mass to clandestine organisations¹¹. In addition, the declaration of independence, and the initiation of the PLO-US dialogue, were regarded as signalling a new stage in the struggle, one in which mass popular mobilization was a means of expressing support

for the diplomatic 'offensive', rather than an instrument of revolutionary change¹².

It was at this point that the position of women in the process of political mobilization became vulnerable. As the second year of the Intifada wore on it became increasingly difficult for women to participate in demonstrations and protests and to engage in political activities outside the home.

At the same time the prolonged and violent repression, and the extreme economic difficulties being endured by Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, were generating responses which had a mixed impact upon the position of women in society. We shall briefly consider some of the more salient issues, and conclude by looking at the response of the women's committees to these developments.

The economic crisis which gripped the Occupied Territories from 1988 onwards was the result of numerous factors; the use of the strike as a political weapon in the Intifada was one, but more important were the vast array of economic sanctions imposed by the Israelis. These encompassed everything from cutting off remittances, increasing taxation, reducing healthcare provision, and restricting Palestinian workers in Israel, to the destruction of agricultural produce, crops, orchards and groves. In these circumstances the marginal wages of women and children became increasingly important, especially as the income of male workers became less reliable as the Intifada progressed. The Palestinian sector was clearly not able to absorb all those who needed employment, so that the trend, which

already existed, towards women's home working, or working in Israel, continued.

However, the general lack of employment, combined with the closure of schools and colleges, gave rise to a resurgence of early marriages among teenage girls. A report on women taking the *tawjihi* exam which appeared in *Voice of Women*(n.d.), the UPWOC magazine, concluded:

With the local universities all closed...their chances of being accepted for higher education are slim. As women this is particularly worrisome. This is a hard time economically, and without work or education, the girls felt sure that their parents would try to force them into early marriage. They ended by saying: 'we are the main victims of this terrible situation'.

Here it is also important to consider the decline in the *mahr* (bride price), which was heralded by many as one of the great social achievements for women during the Intifada. However, another interpretation might question how positive this was in a society in which bride price was a means of expressing esteem towards the bride and her family, and of providing some economic security in case of divorce. Without an accompanying social critique of the institution of *mahr* it might appear as though an injunction to reduce bride price was a reflection on the value of women, especially when coupled with the incidence of early marriage:

There has been a steep rise in the number of marriages in the past two years. The main reason for this is the decline of the bride price. Once upon a time the bride's father would demand JD3,000 in gold and jewels for his daughter, JD2,000 worth of furniture, clothing worth JD1,000, and another JD2,000 to be held in case of divorce.....[Today] everyone is aware of the difficult economic situation, and the parents have lowered the bride price to JD500. This was also the instruction in one

of the Uprising Committee's leaflets (Al-Batash, 1989).

One positive outcome of this trend was the increase in marriages between friends (as well as relatives). In these cases it was common that there would not be any exchange of money as both families appreciated the economic difficulties of the other. Under these circumstances it is clear that the decline in bride price had an obvious beneficial outcome.

However, what is less clear is that this was generally the case - particularly when it was linked to early marriage. Here it suggests that there existed a feeling that the Intifada provided a good opportunity for local men to acquire a wife on the cheap. (Early marriage also has a direct impact upon family size - it is not uncommon for women who married in their mid-teens to have had eight or more children before the age of thirty).

However, despite the increase in early marriages, and the continuing tendency for couples to have their first child as quickly as possible, there is some evidence to suggest that attitudes towards women's role in the family may be changing. As we have already noted, there was an increasing demand - even before the Intifada - for women's employment because of the extremely difficult economic circumstances of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The impact of the Intifada, if anything, strengthened this trend. This is reflected, for example, in the experience of the Ramallah Women's Training Centre (an UNRWA-run vocational training college).

In 1990, during an interview with the director of the college, Lamis Allami, the new phenomenon of mothers

studying on full-time vocational courses was emphasised as being of major significance. The college was closed - along with all other institutions of higher education - for the first two and a half years of the Intifada. When it reopened 85 per cent of second year trainees returned, and 50 per cent of first year students. Out of 241 students who returned, 91 had married in the intervening period, and had given birth to a total of 40 children. The educational qualifications of their husbands was as follows: 36 had degrees, 30 had vocational certificates, and the rest were less educated than their wives. The majority of the women had married outside their immediate family, and 75 of them were living with their husband's family.

Before the Intifada, there were no examples of women studying at the college after they had married. The implication is that despite the recourse to early marriage, particularly among the poorest sections of society, this is no longer seen as the end of other options. It is probable that the same imperatives that led to a resurgence of early marriage, also resulted in a greater willingness to consider other options as well - such as training which might lead to better paid employment outside the home for women - even after marriage and motherhood.

However, the point should not be overemphasised: in the case of the Ramallah Women's Training Centre (RWTC) 50 per cent of the first year students did not return to resume their classes, and for the vast majority of Palestinian girls, higher education and vocational training were not an option. For the majority the

experience of 18-year old Samer, who wanted to be a doctor, is more common:

...her father shakes his head: 'She still dreams of being a doctor. She is very good at school, but she has little chance. She knows this.' (Baxter, 1989).

New Initiatives.

After the first year of the Intifada the women's committees (in common with other mass organisations) undertook a reassessment of their activity.

As a result they set up a number of production cooperatives (see above), and began to concentrate their energies more on specifically women's issues, and less on general political mobilisation. In a way this was a trend which had been set in motion by the banning of the popular committees in the summer of 1988, which had had an impact on their role in the Intifada, and on the contribution of the women's committees to their work.

In the course of an interview with an activist in one of the women's committees in Nablus, she suggested that after the banning of the popular committees it became more difficult for women to play a direct role in them. Their increasingly clandestine nature, and sometimes poor organisation, meant that women faced opposition to their continued involvement.

This was one reason for the redirection of women's energies towards the preexisting activities of the women's committees. Another important factor was the perceptible growth of opposition to women's activism, which made the women's committees look again at the need

for greater cooperation among the different committees, and for a general debate about the formulation of a women's agenda within the national movement (Strum, 1992:215-228).

Roy described the situation in Gaza in the following terms, which seem to reflect many of the concerns being voiced by women activists within the committees:

In the early stages of the uprising, women had made limited economic and political gains, including increased opportunities to leave the home setting for intifada-related activities. With worsening conditions and increased disillusionment, these gains have for the most part been lost (Roy, 1991:65).

The initial dramatic growth in women's activism in all aspects of the national struggle, followed by a gradual resurgence of opposition to that activism, and a sharp deterioration in the economic situation, combined to provide the necessary impetus to encourage the promotion of a number of new initiatives.

At the same time as the declaration of independence, in November 1988, the Women's High Council was established. This was part of a general political initiative to try and cement a unity between the different political factions of the PLO inside the Occupied Territories. It also enjoyed a good deal of support within the women's committees as it was seen as a natural extension of cooperation which had been taking place throughout 1988. For example, in Nablus the different committees held joint public events, organised common support for families of detainees and martyrs, and held shared meetings with Israeli women's groups.

Hiltermann suggests a process of cooperation emerging out of concrete political work which is reminiscent of the situation of the women's associations in the 1930s:

The daily struggle in the streets brought activists from the various factions in the national movement closer together. In the words of one activist, 'because of neighbourhood work, women from the different blocs are now blending, developing strong personal relationships, and struggling side by side' (Hiltermann, 1991:197-8).

The Women's Higher Council (WHC) brought together women from the four existing women's committees into a national coordinating committee with the aim of establishing local branches of the WHC, leading eventually to possible union.

On the occasion of the first anniversary of the Intifada (9 December, 1988) it issued a communique which made explicit the dual nature of women's struggle by calling on women to continue their support for UNLU activities, to ensure the representation of local branches of the women's council on popular committees, and to work for:

Incorporating all women into different frames for the purpose of employing their abilities and directing their efforts toward raising the development of women socially, politically and economically.

The advent of the WHC marked a growing determination among activist women to initiate a debate - initially within their own ranks, and subsequently increasingly in public - about the role of women in the Intifada, and in Palestinian society.

An illustration of the nature of this discussion can be found in the September 1989 issue of **Voice of Women** (UPWWC newsletter). Its front page editorial started:

Has the intifada changed the perception of women's role in Palestinian society? Has it changed the way women themselves perceive their roles? These questions have to be reckoned with by the Palestinian women's movement to enable it to keep pace with the fast-moving events of the intifada.

The article went on to ask a number of questions about how the women's organisations could maintain their new political status and enhance women's social position.

Is the time ripe to begin addressing women's issues with courage and rationality? Are the Palestinian women ready to start a debate on their familial and societal roles? Are they ready to challenge the prevailing family laws? How can women become a power able to participate in decision-making in Palestinian life and politics?

Such questioning seemed to reflect a general willingness among the women's committees to address a specifically feminist agenda, and to attempt to locate it at the heart of the national struggle.

To further this development, a number of women's research centres were established, dealing with issues of particular concern to women¹⁹. Informal discussions were held, and subsequently there were several seminars on various social questions, like veiling, early marriage and the abuse of women. In December 1990 the women's research committee of Bisan (a research and development group) convened a conference entitled 'The Intifada and some women's social issues'. It was attended by almost 500 participants and examined the nature of women's contribution to the Intifada and why there had been set

backs in the social and political fields (News From Within 5.1.1991:4).

Over the course of 1989-90 the outline of a women's agenda was beginning to emerge as a result of these discussions and debates. Issues of primary importance were education and employment, early marriage and divorce, and legal issues. A small group of women began to look at ways of redrafting family law to give equal rights to women, while the women's committees in general began to raise these issues with increasing vigour in their newsletters and internal discussions¹⁴.

At the same time a debate was beginning among activists in the committees - which is still unresolved - about the best strategy to adopt to further their cause. While some favoured the development of a women's movement entirely separate from political organisations and with an exclusively feminist agenda, others wanted to see a struggle within the political factions for full representation and the adoption of a radical social programme. In addition, a smaller number clung to the view that social liberation would follow national liberation.

The proponents of the second view feared that the formation of a separate women's movement would lead to the marginalisation of women in the national movement and alienate the masses. On the other hand the objections raised to struggling within the political factions was that women's representation would never be strong enough to have a decisive impact on the course of political development.

Conclusion.

When the Intifada erupted in December 1987, the women's committees in the West Bank and Gaza Strip were organisationally strong. They had established a network of committees which covered most of the region. This institutional strength, together with their close links with the various political factions, meant that they were ideally placed to make a substantial contribution to the early organisation of the Intifada.

As we have seen, their previous experience in running health, education and employment programmes enabled women to make a valuable contribution to the neighbourhood and popular committees.

The mass mobilization which occurred in the first months of the Intifada gave women in general the space in which to make an active and public contribution to the national struggle. This was assisted by the violent nature of Israeli reaction which meant that it was safer for women to be on the streets than men. Despite the fact that 65 women were killed by Israelis in the first two years of the Intifada¹⁰, it was still the case that they were far less likely to suffer serious injury than their male compatriots.

Yet, despite the organisational role of activists from the women's committees, and the level of women's mobilization, they were unable to turn this political activism into concrete social gains - either within the national movement or in society in general.

Despite the apparent strength of their position within the national movement, the women's committees were

essentially vehicles for the organization of political mass mobilization. They did not have any substantial input into the leadership, or the agenda, of the national movement. This is evident in the language of the UNLU communiques, their neglect of women's issues in the priorities which they set, and their lack of support for women activists.

It is also reinforced in the kind of images of women being promoted by the Intifada leadership; the mother of the martyr, the protector of the family home, and by extension, the preserver of national culture. 'To preserve and persevere' continued to be a fairly accurate reflection of Palestinian nationalist images of women¹⁶.

The reactionary social trends which began to manifest themselves towards the end of the first year of the Intifada, including the resurgence of familial controls and the rise of Islamicist movements, should be viewed in this context. They were a direct threat to the activism of women: the campaign of Hamas to enforce the veil on women could be seen as a reaction to women's involvement in public political activity. Their promotion of codes of conduct for women was another aspect of the attempt to promote a particular image of women as being in some sense culturally authentic (and therefore, politically correct).

In this initial period of retreat the women's committees found themselves unable to respond to the attacks on women's social and political role. For example, during the campaign to impose the veil in Gaza the women's committees did not offer any practical support to their members who were facing considerable personal

intimidation. The account of the experience of one woman activist in Gaza is instructive:

...flammable liquid was thrown at women and people in the refugee camp talked about her behind her back and refused her entry into their houses....'there was no protection from any front - neither the women's nor the national' (Tawfeeq,1990:9).

This merely illustrates the inability of the women's committees to develop and promote a separate agenda, and to take independent initiatives to defend their members.

This continued to be the case even after the committees began to give serious consideration to the development of a women's agenda. For example, women in the UPWC continued to insist that the PFLP's alliance with Hamas, in opposition to the peace talks, was a justifiable tactical position, despite the increasing influence of Hamas and their determined promotion of their social agenda. The fact that this tactical political alliance would fatally compromise an effective counter to the social policies of the stronger party in the alliance continued to be denied.

The experience of the Intifada suggests that the women's committees were effective agents of political organization and mobilization in the early stages, but that once such institutional frameworks were no longer central to the continuance of the Intifada, their position became vulnerable to socially reactionary forces.

This highlighted the lack of a substantial agenda for social change within the women's organisations. As a

result they were in no position to enforce the adoption of such an agenda by the national movement as a whole.

The attempts in 1989-90 to begin to address these issues seem to have been induced by the realisation that, with increasing economic hardship and social dislocation - and the lack of a political settlement in the foreseeable future - the women's committees had to address the social concerns of women if they were to be able to maintain their political position.

The nature of the attacks on women's participation in the Intifada, the resurgence of issues concerning women's position in society, combined with the lack of support from the national movement as a whole, meant that the women's committees could no longer credibly argue that after national liberation women would achieve their own liberation. It was clear that the national movement could not be relied upon to defend the limited gains won by women in the first months of the Intifada, and even less to deliver social freedoms and legal equality in the future.

NOTES

¹ See, for example, Lockman and Beinin (1989); Nassar and Heacock (1990).

² This chapter is primarily concerned with the period up to 1990.

³ See Roy (1991); Co-ordinating Committee of International NGOs (Feb.1991); Tanmiya 23(June 1991).

⁴ This argument was supported in an interview with an activist from one of the women's committees who suggested that the social structure of the villages and camps also hindered women's involvement.

⁵ The work of those involved in 'Education for Awareness and Involvement', established in 1986, was given considerable impetus by the Intifada and the closure of schools. For details see Education for Awareness and Involvement Vol.1.1 (Summer 1990).

⁶ For details see WUS Briefing 'Palestinians : Education Denied' (1989).

⁷ See, for example, chapters by Hiltermann and Tamari in Nassar and Heacock (1990). For the specific example of Beit Sahour in this process see Finkelstein (1990) and Grace (1990).

⁸ Interview with PFLP activist, June 1991.

⁹ See Strum (1992:143-4).

¹⁰ Interview with PFLP activist, June 1991.

¹¹ For a brief discussion of the impact of this on women see Strum (1992:142).

¹² Interview with PCP village activist, July 1990.

¹³ The principle centres were - The Women's Resource Centre in Jerusalem, The Women's Research Centre in Nablus, and the Women's Studies Committee of the Bisan Research and Development Centre.

¹⁴ See, for example, UPWWC, 'Voice of Women' (1.2;1989:1).

¹⁵ UPWWC 'Women...Speak Out Join Efforts for Peace', press release(Dec.1988) lists 65 women martyrs of the Intifada.

¹⁶ 'To Preserve and Persevere' is the title of a pamphlet produced by the PLO Information Department as part of a boxed series under the general title 'Palestine Today' (1990).

Conclusion

The interaction of national, social and gender issues lies at the heart of the relationship between the Palestinian women's organisations and the national movement. In considering the mobilisation of women in the national movement it is apparent that women have been organised around the national question. In the 1920s and 1930s this was done through the Arab Women's Congress and the women's societies, in the 1960s through the General Union of Palestinian Women, and in the 1980s through the women's committees.

The vision of an independent Palestine which was promoted by the PLO was essentially conservative and tradition-bound. This was particularly the case in relation to the images of women used to promote certain key concepts of the national movement such as honour, steadfastness and perseverance. Images of women were used to bolster particular ideas of an ideal rural past, of the protection of the home, and of a willingness to sacrifice all for the cause. This vision of Palestine promoted by the national movement did not contain elements of a socially revolutionary nature, neither did it do anything to promote the cause of gender equality and greater opportunities for women.

Nevertheless the women's organisations were willing to subordinate their activities to the support of the national movement on the basis that after national liberation women would be given their rights because of their role in the struggle.

The acceptance of the political goals of the national movement as the primary aim of the women's organisations coincided with strong similarities in their leaderships. The leadership of the women's organisations reflected the social composition of that of the wider national movement. In the 1920s this consisted largely of a small number of elite families and the urban bourgeoisie. By the 1960s it had expanded to encompass members of the professional classes. The leadership of the 1980s had been further enlarged to include the educated petite bourgeoisie - graduates and professionals whose prospects were extremely limited in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This continuing social cohesion of the leadership cadre of the national movement and the women's organisations offers a further explanation as to the relative lack of conflict with the wider national movement over aims and approaches to the national struggle.

Recruitment to the women's committees came from a number of overlapping channels - political contacts, familial ties, and contacts from educational, employment and health projects. However, essentially it was dominated by the politics of the national movement. The reason for choosing to join one committee as opposed to another depended most upon family, and village political loyalties. On the whole, women did not join a committee because of its particular approach to gender issues, but because of factional alignments within the national movement. In other words, during recruitment to the women's committees it was the national issue which was the predominant factor - and not issues of gender.

The general mobilisation of women for the national movement was not an essential function of the women's

committees. They targeted key sectors - e.g. women workers, students, etc, and attempted to recruit them. The mass mobilisation of women evident in the early days of the Intifada was a result of a combination of factors. The general political climate was primarily responsible. In the early days of the mass popular uprising almost everyone wanted to be involved - and that included women just as much as men. In fact, women's participation was assisted by the violent nature of Israel's response to street protests which meant that it was less dangerous for women to be at the forefront of demonstrations than it was for men.

In addition to this political atmosphere, there were long-term social factors at work which had a specific impact upon the potential for mobilising women. Increased access to education at all levels, the growth in employment of women outside the home, and changes in the family structure, including the emergence of large numbers of female-headed households were all significant. These elements combined to produce a broader basis for women's political participation within the existing structures. It also meant that women's mass mobilisation in response to a national crisis was more likely than might have been the case previously.

The activities of the various women's organisations have been two-fold: firstly, support for the national movement; and secondly, community projects in health, education and employment training. In general terms their strategy was to emphasise the overwhelming pre-eminence of the national struggle in the belief that other problems could be resolved after independence.

This approach led to the tendency to emphasise the need to build broad based support for the national movement, at the expense of defining policies on issues of class and gender - for fear of disrupting the national consensus.

As a result, within the women's committees the development of an agenda for change on questions of gender has been neglected. This was to have a number of practical implications for the work of the women's committees. For example, the women's committees found themselves unable to protect women in Gaza who were being attacked over the question of veiling. In their health care programmes, limitations were visible in the reluctance to prioritise contraception and family planning as key areas of work. Similarly, in the campaigning to recruit women workers to the factionalised trade union movement, they neglected the development of effective strategies for the enhancement of women's working conditions.

Since 1990 it has become increasingly evident that the Intifada has not been able to sustain the initiative vis-a-vis the occupation forces. At the same time, the women's committees found their role in the Intifada being seriously challenged by the Islamicists. As a result of these factors, and the lack of support they received from the wider national movement - and despite their leading role in many of the Intifada's most successful initiatives - they began a serious internal debate over their relationship to the national movement.

For the first time questions were publicly raised about the nature of their relationship to the national

movement. The relationship of social and gender issues to the national question lay at the heart of the debate. It appeared as though the generally accepted approach of resolving the national question before considering social and gender issues was increasingly untenable. Matters of class and gender were so interwoven with the kind of society which the national movement was striving for that they could not be separated from the equation.

The experience of the Intifada suggested that the national issue was capable of inspiring the mass mobilisation of women in reaction to a particular event, or in support of a movement. However, in the longer term, if the activist base of the women's committees were to be genuinely broad-based, and if the mass mobilisation of women was to be sustained, it would appear that there was a need for a more nuanced interpretation of national rights, one which more fully encompassed social, class and gender disparities.

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